**Top 10 tips for university study**

Making the move from studying at college to university study can be a bit daunting, but it should also be exciting and challenging. This document provides some hints and tips on strategies for tackling different aspects of studying at university. You might already be familiar with some of these from your college studies, but it’s always worth trying out different techniques. Some techniques will work better for you than others and it may take a while to find the way of working which suits you best. Remember, you won’t be expected to have mastered the art of effective university study at the beginning of your university course.

This document includes tips on:

* Making the transition from college to university
* Reading and note-taking
* Planning and writing assessments
* Using academic resources

There are loads of different sources of advice and support available to help you develop your study skills (e.g. university academic skills advisors, workshops, drop-in sessions and online guidance). Look out for these at university and don’t be afraid to ask for help when you need it.

(Thanks are due to the following university colleagues, who kindly contributed to the content of this document: Ian Sutherland, Hazel Christie, Virginia Bell, and Dr Velda McCune).

    

    

## Top 10 tips: making the transition from college to university

1. **Do your research before deciding on what course and university to choose.**

Choosing the course and university that’s right for you is vital to your success. Consider the following questions before making your decision:

* 1. Is the location of the university practical?
	2. Did I feel comfortable in the university environment when I visited?
	3. Will the course I am interested in best serve my career goals?
1. **Be realistic about what you can achieve initially: give yourself a chance to settle in.**

Success at university requires hard work. However, the first year at university is as much about learning to learn, getting used to your environment and growing in self-confidence as it is about doing well academically.

1. **Involve your family and friends in the university experience.**

Find a healthy balance between ensuring that family and friends understand the commitment required to succeed as a student with appreciating the effect that your time at university may have on them.

1. **Be positive about your status as a mature student.**

Having the experience to make sensible decisions in your life and being genuinely motivated to engage with your course will not only set a positive example to younger students but will also aid your academic performance.

1. **Prioritise and organise.**

Get into the habit of taking a little time out each week to establish your priorities and to plan and organise your time effectively to meet your objectives. Use a diary/note book.

1. **Don’t put things off.**

Leaving things to the last minute is unlikely to lead to optimum performance.

1. **It doesn’t matter if you can’t do all the extracurricular activities other students do.**

Some students have time to join clubs and societies and take advantage of the social opportunities available at the student union. If getting the balance right between your studies, home life, family and friends and paid work means that you have little opportunity for anything else, that’s okay - you won’t be the only one!

1. **Keep sight of your goals and objectives.**

If your motivation is waning, remind yourself why you decided to study at university.

1. **Try not to worry or stress too much.**

Your success at university will not be measured by obtaining your degree alone, but also by how you deal with challenges you face along the way. Course work and exams are important, but always try to keep them in perspective – look after yourself!

1. **Ask for advice and support.**

Universities have a range of support services there to help students. Use them if you need to.

**Top 10 tips: reading and note-taking**

1. Identifyreadings for a **particular purpose** and draw up a list of questions you want to answer from the reading.
2. Don’t just start reading! Use **skimming and scanning techniques** to get a general idea of the text and pick out any key ideas and facts.
3. Make use of **indexes, introductions, abstracts, summaries and conclusions** in textbooks and articles.
4. Try out different **note taking techniques** to find one that works for you.
5. **Mind maps** can work well as an alternative way of making notes.
6. You may find it best to use a **different technique** when taking notes from reading materials to that which you use when taking notes in lectures.
7. After you have made notes, **review** them, **fill in any gaps** and **note down any unanswered questions** to look up later.
8. Listen for **key points** in lectures and note down any **emphasis** the lecturer makes (e.g. ‘this is an important aspect of the topic’).
9. **Prepare by reading** for lectures and tutorials, so that you are familiar with the terminology and vocabulary associated with the subject. This will also make it easier to take notes.
10. Keep your own **glossary of terms and abbreviations** and remember to note down any useful references from your reading for future use.

**Top 10 tips: planning and writing assessments**

1. **Plan back** from the assignment deadline. Set short-term goals for each week, check your progress and revise your goals if necessary.
2. Divide your time roughly **50:50** (planning/research and writing).
3. **Planning around the word count** helps you focus on what’s involved and helps break the tasks down into realistic chunks.
4. Take time over the title/question - **think, question, clarify**.
5. Research tip: before you gather materials, think about the **type of information** you are looking for. This helps you to focus and research more actively and avoid collecting too much material ‘just in case it’s useful’.
6. You don’t need to study for hours at a time. Practice using **small chunks of time** to read a small amount or plan a paragraph - make good use of half an hour.
7. Assignment writing can be lonely. **Talk about what you’re doing**, communicate any worries and concerns and make time to discuss with other students.
8. Be prepared to **‘go round in circles’** a bit. Producing assignments involves searching for ideas and information, rejecting things, going back to others. It’s rarely a linear process!
9. A **straightforward, clear writing style** is best. Three short sentences are usually better than one long rambling one and will help you be clearer about what you are trying to say.
10. Always take time to **reflect** on how you have done. What will you do differently next time? Feedback exists to help. Try taking just one piece of advice to work on for the next assignment.

**Top 10 tips: using academic resources**

1. **Remember your existing skills.**

Existing skills can be adapted. Even if the way you used sources previously was a bit different to what’s required at university, what you’ve learned will still be useful.

1. **Think about developing your skills over the course of a degree.**

Learning to use academic sources in a critical and reflective way takes a long time to master. So, remember to keep thinking about how you might develop, even if you sail through first year with no problems.

1. **Don’t try to be perfect!**

The occasional typo in your references isn’t the end of the world. Don’t get so hung up on the fiddly bits that you don’t have time to think about. That said, a text with lots of mistakes will irritate markers.

1. **Watch out for assumptions.**

Students often lose marks by assuming that the way sources were used in the past or in other university modules will be acceptable for the modules they are currently studying.

1. **Read the paperwork.**

Your university and subject area will probably have documentation about citing sources and avoiding plagiarism. Read these before you start your assessments.

1. **Think carefully about your note taking system.**

A good note taking system can help you compare ideas, make connections and question claims made in sources. It can also help record the difference between your own ideas and those taken from sources. Carefully noting referencing details of sources you use as you go along saves hunting for them the night before your work is due.

1. **Think about short cuts before you dive in.**

Think about short cuts that can save you time, such as skimming several sources to see which are easiest to read or starting with a recent source that summarises earlier work. Work out how to log what’s really relevant to your assignment, so you don’t end up with lots of notes you’ll never use.

1. **Being critical doesn’t necessarily mean being negative.**

If you’re having trouble figuring out how to come up with critical comments on sources, remember you don’t always have to be negative. If you explain to the reader the ways in which a particular experiment or theory is good then you’re showing critical judgement.

1. **Look out for clues about the ‘ways of thinking’ used in your subjects.**

Different subject areas have their own ways of evaluating ideas. Look out for clues to these (e.g. how do staff present sources, how do authors in the field evaluate others’ work?).

1. **Allow extra time to get used to new ways of working with sources.**

Doing things differently, or to a higher standard, tends to go more slowly at first. Allow a bit of extra time when you first work with sources at university. It may take longer at first until your skills develop, but you’ll soon get the hang of it.