

OXFORD
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UNIVERSITY

Oxford Brookes Quick Start Guide





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This booklet has been adapted by the Centre for Academic Development (with permission) from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's 2022 publication entitled *The Student Guide to the Hidden Curriculum*.

We would like to thank the QAA for allowing us to do this, along with colleagues and students at Brookes who have provided comments to enable us to make this resource as useful as possible.

Oxford Brookes Quick Start Guide

This guide has been created to help explain some of the terminology that you may come across whilst at university. It is likely that a lot of the terminology we use in university will be new to you, so this guide is a resource to keep and use as and when you need it.

In this guide, we've tried to anticipate the questions you might have as you start to navigate university life and familiarise yourself with the different principles, structures and processes. Designed in consultation with the university community (see Appendix), it is, effectively, a glossary of Oxford Brookes University terminology. We recommend that you read through it before you start university but also come back to it during your first week and throughout your first semester as needed. Please note, some terms may be used in slightly different ways, depending on your course and level of study. It is not possible for a guide like this to tell you everything you need to know about university study, but it will help you to begin your exciting learning journey in an informed way. The digital version of this guide includes many links which will enable you to explore topics in more detail.

Oxford Brookes Quick Start Guide

We have organised this guide into 6 sections:



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Who's who at university

You will encounter a lot of different roles and job titles in university life. Oxford Brookes is a large university which has around 16,900 students, 2,800 members of staff and over 190,000 alumni (former students) worldwide.





Who's who at university: students

Freshers

A 'fresher' is a student who has just started their first year at a university. Staff from your course work with people from support departments and Brookes Union to organise events to welcome students to Oxford Brookes. These are known as freshers' events, and include Induction Week, a societies fair, and social events. Commercial organisations may also organise events, and you should ensure that you know whether events are sanctioned by the university or not. You'll sometimes hear Induction Week called 'Freshers' Week'. These two terms mean the same thing, but we tend to use 'Induction Week' at Oxford Brookes.

Undergraduate students

Undergraduate students are students who are studying for their first degree at university.

Postgraduate students

Postgraduate students are students who, typically, have completed an undergraduate degree and are undertaking further study. There are two types of postgraduate student - taught and research. Taught postgraduates will usually be studying for a master's degree, while research postgraduates will usually be studying for a PhD (a higher level research degree).

Brookes Union (students' union)

As an independent body, Brookes Union represents the voices of the students at Oxford Brookes. Students have the opportunity to elect peers to take on full-time roles as their representatives at the most senior meetings within the university. Brookes Union provides students with independent advice on Oxford Brookes' policies and regulations, as well as offering opportunities to engage in social activities, develop skills for university and beyond, and navigate the many different aspects of student life. Brookes Union runs 'Freshers' Week' events (part of Induction Week) as well as a range of events throughout the year.

Brookes Union

Clubs, societies and student networks

Brookes Union supports many student societies and networks. Societies are social, skills or hobbies based, subject based, or involved in social action, such as supporting student wellbeing or helping in schools. If you have an idea for a society that does not yet exist, you can talk to Brookes Union and apply to start it. Societies are usually run by committees, and becoming involved in organising a society can be rewarding, and look good on your CV. In addition to societies, Brookes Union also supports students in running a variety of community networks within the university. These are spaces to come together, build community, make connections and help create positive change at Oxford Brookes.

Brookes Union Societies

Brookes Union Student Networks



Who's who at university: teaching staff



Teaching staff may have different titles, such as lecturer, professor, tutor, reader, demonstrator or teaching fellow, but it is important to remember that the people you can learn from are not limited to the teachers on your course. You can also learn from other students as well as through the many workshops and resources available from departments such as the Library, the Centre for Academic Development, Careers, and IT Training.

Lecturer

Lecturers, Senior Lecturers and Principal Lecturers are academic staff who are responsible for the teaching and assessment on your course. Associate Lecturers are usually employed in teaching roles only, often on a part-time basis, which means they may not be as accessible as other academic staff. Lecturers will also often conduct their own research, publish journal articles, apply for grant funding to support the research activity within the department, and peer review other people's research.

Professor

Professors are the highest rank of academic staff in a university. In the UK, around one in 10 academics is a professor. Being appointed to a professorship is part of a promotion process and staff will need to meet certain criteria relating to their role. Professors who have retired but are continuing to contribute to the work of the university have the title Professor Emeritus/a.



JOHN HENRY BROOKES
BUILDING



Senior Management

Oxford Brookes is divided into 4 academic faculties: **Oxford Brookes Business School, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment**. A faculty is a collection of academic departments (sometimes called schools) that share related interests. There are different schools within each of the 4 faculties at Oxford Brookes.

Each faculty has a **Pro Vice-Chancellor** who is Dean of the faculty and who is responsible for the overall management and strategy of the faculty. They are supported in their work by **Associate Deans**. On your programme, you may come across the following roles:

- **Programme lead and subject co-ordinator** who oversees the teaching and learning on that programme.
- **Module leader** who is responsible for the delivery of specific module(s) within a programme, including the resources and assessment.

Responsibility for the day-to-day running of Oxford Brookes University rests with the **Vice-Chancellor**, Professor Alistair Fitt, and the Vice-Chancellor's Group (VCG). The Board of Governors leads the University strategically by determining the overall mission.

The University also has a **Chancellor**, which is an honorary, ceremonial position. The Chancellor gives an annual lecture, presides over certain ceremonies, and acts as an inspiration and ambassador for the university; a Chancellor is not involved in the day-to-day governing of the university. The current Chancellor is author and actor [Paterson Joseph](#).



Support and development

Oxford Brookes provides many support and development opportunities. Make the most of these, as they will help you to navigate your university experience and get the most out of your time at university.





Support and development

Academic Advisor

All students on taught programmes at Oxford Brookes will be allocated an Academic Advisor from the academic staff within their department or school. Your Academic Advisor is a valuable contact throughout your degree who will complement the academic guidance provided within your programme. They will help you navigate all the academic aspects of university and can direct you to other support when needed, such as your [Student Support Co-ordinator](#). They may also be the person who provides you with a reference for a job when you move on from university. The name and contact details of your Academic Advisor can be found on your 'Record and Results' page in [Student Information](#).

Academic Liaison Librarians

Academic Liaison Librarians can help you to find information from books, journals and other sources, like our online databases, and can support you with referencing. They are also responsible for purchasing materials for the library and helping you to access anything you need from the library for your course. Each course has one or more academic liaison librarians who can help you with finding information and resources for assignments, finding online resources and referencing your sources. The library also offers [interactive guides](#) for new starters.

IT services

IT services provide IT support and have plenty of 'how to' guides for students. They offer support and guidance on getting set up digitally at Oxford Brookes, from logging into systems to discovering the range of software you can use.

International Student Advice Team

The International Student Advice Team (ISAT) can help with a range of services and advice for international students including immigration advice under the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner guidelines. They also run events and workshops to help you understand UK culture and make the most of your time in the UK.

Careers

Employability is about much more than getting a job which is why it is an integral part of any course of study at Oxford Brookes. It's about developing your skills, values and self-awareness and seeking out new experiences that will help you to succeed both during and beyond your time at university. As part of this, Careers provides a range of support and development opportunities, including help with your CV (resumé), practice interviews, and other preparation for applying and getting a job. You may also want to enhance your experience at Oxford Brookes and add to your CV by working part time or volunteering. Careers [Jobshop](#) and [Volunteer Centre](#) provide opportunities to build your confidence, gain new skills and make a difference to your local community.

Centre for Academic Development

It is not always obvious how to study effectively. To succeed, you will need to build on existing skills and develop new ones. You will also need to develop the confidence and self reflective capacity to learn from feedback and develop your academic practice as you progress through your university journey. The Centre for Academic Development offers workshops, modules, 1:1 tutorials, writing retreats and online resources to help you reach your full potential, offering expert guidance in areas that include research and writing, academic language, mathematics and statistics. Whether you are a first year undergraduate referencing for the first time or a dissertation student contemplating how to analyse the data you have gathered, there's something useful here for everyone.



Support and development

Student Support Co-ordinator (SSC)

SSCs provide dedicated support within each faculty and can help with any problem you may be encountering with your subject or course, offering a confidential and non-judgemental service with regular office hours. SSCs deal with a wide range of queries, such as how to use your Student Information pages and change modules, as well as personal and confidential issues. If you are not sure who to talk to about an issue you are facing, the Student Support Coordinators are a welcoming team who can point you in the right direction. SSCs can, if necessary, refer you to one of the central services such as [Counselling](#), the [Inclusive Support Service](#) or your [Academic Advisor](#).

Student Welfare and Support Advice Team

The Student Welfare and Support Advice Team offer support if you are in crisis or are experiencing serious circumstances that are affecting your studies. You can also contact the Student Welfare and Support Advice Team if you are concerned about another student and want to talk through your concerns in confidence.

Student Central Advice Team

The Student Central Advice Team (SCAT) can help you with a wide range of administrative course and programme queries as well as information about attendance certificates, council tax exemption, award verification and transcripts.

Brookes Union Student Advice

This is a free, confidential service independent from the university. They offer advice on Oxford Brookes' policies and [regulations](#), including, for example, academic issues such as [exceptional circumstances](#), or issues with University [accommodation](#).

Inclusive Support Service

If you have a disability or long term condition, defined under the Equality Act 2010, the Inclusive Support Service will be able to provide you with support and advice. This includes students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia/DCD, attention deficit disorder and dyscalculia, autistic spectrum conditions and long-term physical and mental health conditions. You should contact the Inclusive Support Service as soon as you can to speak to one of the advisors. They will work with you to create an Inclusive Support Plan (ISP) that will state the reasonable adjustments for which you are eligible. They will also work with your academic department to make sure that teaching and assessment is as inclusive and accessible as possible.





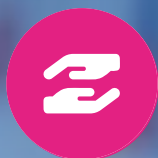


Mental health and wellbeing support

[Student Support and Wellbeing](#) is a hub for advice and support for your emotional, mental health, welfare, spiritual and pastoral wellbeing. Our dedicated range of specialist Mental Health and Wellbeing support teams are here for you whether you are on campus or studying remotely. Our specialist teams include [Counsellors](#), Mental Health Advisers, [Student Welfare and Support Advisers](#) and Chaplains from a range of faith traditions. If you need help but are unsure which type of support would be appropriate or helpful, please email studentsupportservices@brookes.ac.uk.

If your mental health has a substantial long-term negative impact on your ability to do normal daily activities, you should seek support from the [Inclusive Support Service](#). It is also advisable to register with a local doctor also known as a GP (general practitioner) near your university and/or accommodation and use them or the wider NHS for mental health treatment as required.

If you are struggling with your mental health, contact your [Student Support Co-ordinator](#), your [Academic Advisor](#), and try to keep your teaching department informed. Remember you can apply for [exceptional circumstances](#) if needed so that your academic work doesn't suffer as a result. More information about exceptional circumstances can be found on page 35.



Support and development: The Library

The Library

You can expect to find all the core texts that you need for your course in the library, as well as useful study spaces. The library also has many more functions. Through LibrarySearch (the main search engine on the [library homepage](#)) and your [course resource help page](#) (which has resources specific to your course), you will be able to access journal articles or other course-related online content that you will need during your degree. This means you should never have to use your own money to pay for this information. You will have a library induction, which includes how to use the online library when you start at Oxford Brookes. The library also offers [interactive guides for new starters](#) along with information and resources about [how to reference](#).

LibrarySearch

LibrarySearch is a search engine that helps you to find items held within the library. These can be physical items or items that can be accessed online, such as e-books and e-journals. You may also hear LibrarySearch referred to as a 'library catalogue'.

Database

A database is an online collection of information you can search using a computer or device. The 'Course resources and support' section of the library pages provides a list of databases commonly used in your subject or discipline. The library also provides useful information, including short videos, about how to search databases.

Reading list

Most modules will have a reading list. This may be a list of required, recommended and/or additional texts for your course. You won't usually be expected to read all the titles on the list but instead choose titles that are relevant to your interests and/or help you to complete an assignment. You can access your reading list via Moodle or by clicking on the 'Reading Lists' tab under the 'Search the Library' heading on the [library home page](#).

Journal article

Academics often publish their scholarly work in journals, and you will use these a great deal at university. Journal articles are used to disseminate or share research and include articles, discussion papers and book reviews.

Peer review

Peer review is an important way of assuring the quality of journal articles. When an academic submits a research paper to a journal, the editor of the journal will send the paper to other academics, who will provide feedback on the quality of the paper. The editor will decide whether the paper can be published, or whether the authors need to do more work. Peer review is usually done for free, depends on goodwill and takes a long time. Increasingly, research papers will be submitted to university archives as 'preprints', allowing research to be accessed more quickly.



Teaching and learning

Learning is an active process. This guide looks at two aspects of teaching and learning: the structure and organisation of teaching and learning and the delivery (how you will be taught).





Teaching and learning: Structure and organisation

Enrolment

All students must enrol before starting their course. During the enrolment process, your personal and academic details (e.g. your course of study) are checked and confirmed, and course fee payment details are submitted. At Oxford Brookes, enrolment is online and usually opens a few weeks before the term starts. Once enrolled, you will gain access to the university study platforms (Moodle) as well as access to your Oxford Brookes email. If you have any questions about this process, contact the [Student Central Advice Team](#).

Module

A module is a discrete ‘chunk’ or unit of learning with its own learning outcomes and, usually, its own assessment. Most of the courses at Oxford Brookes are modularised. Where courses are modular, they can comprise different modules which may vary in size. The size of modules is described as a number of credits. Modules are designated as compulsory or optional within the context of a specified taught programme of study, as set out in the approved [programme specification](#).

Compulsory and optional modules

Compulsory modules are a core part of an undergraduate degree and must be completed with a pass mark in order to be awarded your degree. Optional modules are modules you choose from a selection. You will need to complete a certain number of modules to be awarded your degree but there is some choice involved. More information about undergraduate modular programmes can be found in this [glossary of key terms](#).

Credit system

For every module completed you are awarded credits at Oxford Brookes. This is a system for calculating how each of your modules is weighted and therefore how much they contribute to your overall grade. On full-time courses, you usually study 120 credits in each year with an undergraduate honours degree usually comprising 360 credits in total. Each credit requires a notional 10 hours of study effort, which is divided between direct contact with teaching staff, directed learning, independent study and assessment. So a module that has 15 credits will have 150 hours of study time allocated. Some modules are single (15 credits) and some are double (30 credits). How those hours are allocated to different learning tasks will be dependent upon the type of course and learning outcomes for the module. At Oxford Brookes, modules at level 6 and below have a standard credit value of 15 credits while modules at level 7 have a standard credit value of 20 credits.

Levels

Levels usually refer to a specific year of your degree and are defined in the [Qualifications Frameworks for Higher Education](#). The course codes for your modules will reflect this in the first number of the 4 digit code. For example, SUBJ4001 would be a level 4 course.

Typically:

- Level 4- first year of an undergraduate degree
- Level 5- second year of an undergraduate degree
- Level 6- third year of an undergraduate degree
- Level 7- postgraduate level of study

Semester

A semester is a period of teaching time and there are typically 2 semesters each academic year. A semester runs for 12 weeks.



Teaching and learning: Delivery

Timetable

The Oxford Brookes timetable provides information about when teaching and assessments will take place. Oxford Brookes publishes the timetable for the whole academic year at the start of July in the Google calendar. Your personal Google calendar will be updated with the teaching events for your modules as this information is processed. For information about using your Brookes Google calendar, visit the Google Apps page on the Brookes website. Timetables may need to change during the year so you will need to check them often. We will minimise changes as much as possible.

Lecture

A lecture is a large-group teaching session that is run by a lecturer or member of teaching staff. Lectures are typically taught in lecture theatres or halls. During a lecture, you will listen to information and make appropriate notes as the lecturer is speaking to you. Lectures are often recorded so you can access them on Moodle after they have been delivered but the live experience is always best as it can include opportunities to ask questions and it is usually easier to focus on your learning in-person than via a recording.

Seminars and tutorials

Depending on your course, you will have teaching sessions that are not lectures. Small group teaching sessions may be called tutorials, supervision, seminars or workshops. This will vary between courses and modules but you will usually be required to prepare some work in advance, and be given the opportunity to discuss course material more closely with other students and a teacher.

Practical teaching and learning

While lectures and seminars are the two most commonly known examples of teaching and learning at university level, it's important to recognise that there are many different and effective ways of teaching and learning in higher education, particularly among practice-based courses. Examples include laboratory-based demonstration and assessment in the sciences, studio work, production and performance in the creative arts, field trips and working and/or studying abroad as part of the study of modern languages. Interactive classes like this can be daunting at first, but they are an opportunity to try out your ideas and develop essential skills in listening, discussion, teamwork, analysis and much more! Students in some fields, such as healthcare, education or hospitality and events management, may also have longer work placements as part of their learning.

Office hours

Office hours (sometimes referred to as Academic Advising Tutorials or Drop-in Hours) are the time when academic staff will be available for you to discuss anything you need in relation to your courses. This can be in-person in their office or online as a virtual one-to-one. You can often contact academic staff outside this time via email too.

VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) Moodle

For your modules, you will use Moodle to access your reading list, module handbook and course materials, such as lecture slides and notes. You will also use Moodle to submit assessments using [Turnitin](#). Moodle is the platform you will use for important announcements, messages and notifications about your courses. You might be asked to participate in discussion forums or take part in interactive activities, depending on your course and module.



Assessment and feedback

Who sets and marks your assessments?

In universities, assessments are set and marked by the people who teach you. There will be an internal process of moderation, when another member of staff, usually in the same department, will read a sample of the assessments and make sure that they agree with the grades awarded. Grades will remain provisional until an external examiner, who is an academic from a different university, also views students' work and grades. The external examiner's role is to ensure that the marking process is fair and that the marking is to a consistent standard across a cohort, and broadly aligned with how the subject is assessed in other universities. External examiners do not alter individual student grades.

How will my work be graded?

University marking scales vary. Oxford Brookes uses categorical marking schemes - where your work is assigned a number. This is simply a way of being able to combine your attainment across modules. This means, for example, if you get 58, that doesn't mean you have got four things wrong compared to a 62. Instead, these numbers relate to the marking criteria. In other words, work that is graded a 62 is a different standard to that of a 58. These numbers relate to different award classifications (see final award classification on page 35). At Oxford Brookes, modules at level 6 and below have a pass mark of 40%, while modules at level 7 have a pass mark of 50%.

Methods of assessment

Over the course of a full programme of study, students may experience a variety of assessment formats, including practical tasks, essays, portfolios of work, oral presentations, laboratory reports, projects/dissertations, and online tests. These activities may sometimes be referred to as coursework. **Examinations (or exams)** may take a range of formats as appropriate to the knowledge and skills being assessed.

How are written assessments marked?

Written assessments are marked according to a marking criteria. This is a document that lists the skills and learning outcomes, and specifies what you should do in order to reach the necessary standards. Work is usually marked holistically - so it isn't about how many times you include (for example) a description of a study, but about the quality of that description, and how effectively you use material to support your argument.

How will I submit my written assessments?

[Turnitin](#) is the platform used by Oxford Brookes for students to submit written assignments. It compares your work to published books, websites, and other people's work (both within your university and at other universities) and then produces a 'similarity score', which shows how similar your work is to other writing. Whilst a high similarity score does not automatically mean there is a problem with academic conduct, you should learn the rules of referencing as soon as possible and take the university's online academic integrity course to ensure you are following good academic practice from the beginning.

Turnitin video guide



Assessment and feedback

Learning outcomes

When academics design a module, they will decide what they want you to learn, know or be able to do as a result of studying the module. This will be described by the learning outcomes. In order to check that you have achieved the learning outcomes, you will be assessed, and your assessment should directly relate to the learning outcomes of the module.

Marking criteria

Marking criteria describes what you need to do to achieve different marks on an assessment. There will usually be different aspects of the criteria, relating to different programme or module outcomes. You should refer to the marking criteria in advance of completing an assessment - it can help you understand what is expected of you. You may receive feedback that is based around the marking criteria which will describe how well you are achieving the learning outcomes. The marking criteria may be provided separately or it might be included in the module handbook, all of which can be found on Moodle.

Formative assessment

Formative assessment is an assessment that doesn't count towards your grades, but supports your learning, for example by giving you an opportunity to practise and receive feedback on work, which should improve your ability to complete summative assessments.

Summative assessment

Summative assessment is an assessment that counts towards your final grade or mark.

Final award classification

In the UK, undergraduate degrees are classified - when you complete your whole award, you don't just get a grade (for example, 65), you also receive a classification. The best classification is a First - this is usually for work that is exceptionally good, and has a grade of over 70. The next classification is a 2.1 (two-one). This is the top half of a second class degree, and usually applies to work that has a grade of 60-70. The next classification is a 2.2 (two-two). This is the lower half of a second class degree and has a grade range of 50-60. The final classification is a third-class degree, for work with a grade between 40-50. Work that has a mark below 40 is a fail. Every university has a slightly different algorithm (or calculation) for combining work across years and modules to produce the final degree classification.

When you complete your degree at Oxford Brookes, as well as your degree classification you'll also get a [Grade Point Average \(GPA\)](#) score on your degree transcript. A GPA is a reflection of your academic performance throughout your studies and is recognised internationally, meaning it might be helpful if you want to study or work overseas. You can track your GPA throughout your course through Student Information on your Record & Results page.

Mitigation (Exceptional circumstances)

Mitigation is the process by which a university helps students who have had difficulties during an assessment. For example, if a student needs an extension to the original deadline because they are ill, this is mitigation. Students at Oxford Brookes need to apply for [exceptional circumstances](#), and provide evidence to support their case.





Feedback

Feedback is provided on your work by the academic staff who mark it. Feedback is usually provided in the form of a mark or grade, and written comments. However, at university, feedback can also be in many other forms, such as oral comments, informal suggestions, peer feedback, or group feedback. Being open to feedback in all its forms will help you make the most of it. It is important to remember that feedback is intended to be objective and constructive, supporting you to achieve your ambitions as a student. It should help you to improve your work for future assignments.

You don't have to use your feedback immediately. When you receive feedback, think honestly about how you approached the work, what worked well and what you might like to do differently next time. Remember to revisit your feedback before you start a new piece of work. Write an action plan that records what you will do differently next time.

Feedback should help you to improve, but you need to engage with it to identify areas for development to improve your marks. If you don't understand your feedback contact the academic who marked the work and ask to discuss it. You can also contact the [Centre for Academic Development](#) or your [Academic Advisor](#).

The Centre for Academic Development offers advice on how to use your feedback in its [online resources](#).

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is doing your own work and giving credit to others for their work. Academic integrity requires all of us to follow good academic practice, which involves reflecting on how you research and take notes, and making sure you are familiar with all the university's rules and regulations about the work you submit. It is a more complex subject than you might think, including, for example, the appropriate use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in your studying and assessment. We therefore recommend that all new students complete the university's **Academic Integrity online course**. The **Student Investigation and Resolution Team (SIRT)** manages the policies and procedures relating to student conduct.

Cheating and Plagiarism

Oxford Brookes sets out rules for academic conduct. Breaking those rules is considered cheating and can result in significant penalties. For example, **plagiarism** is where a student uses other people's work and presents it as their own and is a serious offence.

Academic Integrity

Student conduct





Good study behaviours

What does it mean to study independently?

In-class learning, such as time spent in seminars or lectures, is only part of the learning that you will do at university. You will also have to undertake lots of independent study. The type of independent work that you will need to do will differ during the semester but might involve note making, reading, completing coursework or preparing for exams. Part of studying independently is staying informed. Make sure you know where to find important information, such as [Regulations for Study](#), the [University Handbook](#) and [Student Information](#). You can ask your Academic Advisor for guidance about how best to spend your independent study time.

What to do if you don't understand something

Ask!

No question is a stupid question. Ask a peer, tutor, or librarian. Far from being a sign of weakness, asking for help is usually the sign of a good student. It means you can recognise your own weaknesses, identify who to approach for help, and are engaged enough to want to work at improving your skills without prompting.

Learning isn't always comfortable

Overall, your degree will be a fun and inspiring learning experience. But sometimes learning will feel difficult and you are not necessarily going to enjoy every aspect of your degree. That's okay and is a completely normal part of the learning process. Learning has a complex relationship with emotion. Sometimes the parts of your course which you find most difficult can also be the most rewarding and you will feel very proud to have succeeded. Learning is a process that you can practise and get better at. It's also a skill for life, which can help you in your future career and wider activities.



Good study behaviours

Academic writing

It takes time to learn to write well and we all (lecturers included) go through a process of writing, reviewing and rewriting before we arrive at a finished product. Academic writing is formal and different subjects have different writing conventions, which you will discover through reading and trying out writing yourself. One way to discover the qualities of good writing in your discipline is to do lots of reading, though you should be aware that not everything that gets published is well-written!

Critical thinking

The term ‘critical thinking’ is used a lot in UK Higher Education, but it can be hard to define, as it isn’t just a single skill. ‘Critical thinking’ covers a series of processes that we use to ensure we have good reasons to support our arguments. Critical thinking is best thought of as having a questioning outlook on life, and not accepting any reasons at face value without first asking, ‘What do I think about this?’ and then most importantly, ‘Why do I think this?’

Questioning is one of the most important skills to acquire on your university journey and helps you demonstrate critical thinking. Critical thinking involves appreciating what sources are telling you, and how they support or undermine the story or argument you are making within your own piece of work. To be critical is to be able to appreciate strengths as well as limitations, and to see how a source fits into the bigger story. This is a challenging set of skills to acquire and will take some practice but developing your critical thinking skills will really enhance your studies and life beyond university.

Note making

Good note making skills are particularly useful while reading and attending lectures. Your notes can provide a written record of information for you to review and can also help you to better understand and engage with the information presented. How you make notes depends on your purpose, so before you start, think about how you would like to use your notes in the future. Whether you are reading or attending a lecture, try to focus your notes on the key ideas, instead of trying to record every word. Make sure to record the source information such as the author and date, especially when reading for assessment.

Reading

Your lecturers will expect you to read between lectures as well as attending. How much and what type of reading will depend upon your subject and purpose. Some reading will be for general background and some you will be required to study in more detail. When you start reading, try and think about why you are reading that piece, as that will determine what you are looking for, and therefore what sort of notes you will need to make. Sometimes reading will help you to develop your own writing style, sometimes you will be looking for specific details.



Good study behaviours

Referencing

Referencing is an important part of academic writing. It is how you let the reader of your work know where your ideas have come from and/or the authors who have influenced your thinking. The precise details of referencing vary across subjects and across universities and you should make sure that you are using the correct format for your work. Checking the required format for your referencing is a useful skill.

Reflection

Reflection is the act of thoughtfully revisiting things to ‘make sense’ of them. You may, for example, be asked to write a reflective commentary on how you have approached an essay. This would involve describing your process, but then considering what worked well and how a particular process could be improved. Being able to reflect on your experiences objectively is not just a requirement of some assignments, but an important life skill to prepare you for life after university.

Time management & organisation

Time management at university involves looking ahead more than a week at a time to anticipate the bigger picture, such as deadlines clustering at the end of semester, or weeks when you'll be busy with other commitments. You might not be able to make your life less busy, but you will be able to prepare for what is coming.



Appendix

The Student Guide to the Hidden Curriculum was first published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in October 2021, after which the authors conducted an evaluation of the resource with undergraduate students (N = 109) and academic staff (N = 32). In response to student and staff feedback, the guide was refined and updated to offer an Expanded Edition in 2022. The Oxford Brookes Quick Start Guide has been adapted (with permission) from this Expanded Edition.

Your notes:



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