

Preparing For Your First Year at University



Strategies for Maximising Your Success

Student Learning Development

University of Otago

This booklet is an introduction to some of the skills and strategies that will help you succeed in your first few weeks of your first year at University. Additional skills and strategies are outlined on the Student Learning Development webpage.

Based on materials developed for Student Learning Development at the University of Otago.

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Getting Started at Uni

Experiencing ‘Culture Shock’? Here are some survival tips:

Explore your new environment

Starting University can cause feelings of alienation, helplessness, and loss of confidence. To help you feel at home, get to know as much as possible about your new environment, its people, and places. You might like to familiarise yourself by taking a library tour, wandering around the campus, and/or making contact with departments.

Know who can help and what academic support is available

At University you are expected to be an independent learner and responsible for managing your own studies, but that does not mean that you have to handle the load without support.

Go to the first-year section of the University website for more:

Learn how to succeed in your degree from the start



Develop the skills to succeed

Start here for tips, resources and videos on how to study at university



How to use the library

Learn how to get the most out of the library for assignments and exams



How do classes work?

Find out about lectures, tutorials and more



How exams work

Your starting point for learning about exams at Otago



Course advice

Take the guesswork out of planning your degree



Changing your course

Otago offers flexible degrees – talk to us about changing direction



Academic integrity

Advice and rules on plagiarism and academic misconduct

Make friends

One of the keys to surviving in any new culture is to develop a network of friends and acquaintances not only for a healthy social life, but also because it is helpful and reassuring to chat about classes and assignments.

Join a peer support programme

If you are an international student who would like to practise their conversational English, Student Learning Development run an [English conversation group](#) three times a week. For more information, email englishlanguage.peersupport@otago.ac.nz. The [Māori and Pacific Island centres](#) have peer-learning programmes, and the [Locals Programme](#) also offer support to first-year students not residing in a residential college.

Balance work and play

It's important to find time in your busy student schedule for social and leisure activities. The University offers programme and equipment on a whole range of hobbies, social events, and sports. Check out Unipol and OUSA clubs and societies.

'Tune in' to course work

Read through the course outline for each of your papers to get a sense of the 'big picture'. Know what the learning outcomes are and use these as a guide to organise your study. Prioritise attending your classes. More information below.

Employ effective study and learning approaches

To feel in control at university, you will need to manage your workload and meet assignment deadlines. Through individual assistance or workshops, Student Learning Development can help you be as effective as possible in your reading, writing, note-taking, time-management, and exam preparation. Staff can help you identify your current learning styles and adapt your current practices where necessary.

Checklists for Effective Study

- I have read all the course outlines/overviews and have a good idea of what is expected of me in all courses I am enrolled in.
- In case I need assistance, I know who, and how to contact, the course coordinators/tutors/administrators in all my course.
- I know which textbooks or course readers I need and have them/am in the process of getting them/have easy access to them.
- I know my logon to Blackboard and regularly check the entire relevant Blackboard sites for course announcements, resources etc.
- I am attending all lectures/tutorials/labs/workshops provided by my courses.
- Before lectures, I have done the required/recommended readings for all of my classes (to make more sense of classes and to make better notes).
- During each lecture I am actively engaged in class, listening, processing, and making notes about the material presented.
- Within 2 days after each lecture, I process my lecture notes, ask myself questions about the material and summarise, edit, and add useful notes to lecture material from readings.
- I organise and file my notes and handouts regularly.
- I have marked the dates of all my tests, exams, and assignments on a calendar.
- I know how to access any course-recommended readings or web resources.
- I know what the Student Learning Development office is for and where it is.
- I know about extra opportunities that will support my learning (e.g. college tutorials, PASS, study groups, and online resources).
- Every week I spend an appropriate amount of focused time on my coursework.

It is never too late to turn 'no' into 'yes'. Part of your learning is learning how to be a university student. Read on for more study-tips.

Making the Most of Your Notes

SLD have many [online resources](#) to help with study and note-taking. The information below is a brief example. If you want individual assistance, email: hedc.studentlearning@otago.ac.nz.

Before the lecture:

To more easily understand concepts in lectures, read your readings beforehand (usually available on Blackboard).

Before you start, think about why you are making the notes. What do you plan on gaining from the reading? Are the notes preparation for a lecture, assignment, exam, or general study? The purpose will determine how detailed your notes will be and what form they will take.

Read and take notes in manageable chunks. Summarise as you go. You can write notes in various ways:

- Bullet pointing important ideas
- Using tables
- Mapping out concepts

During the lecture:

Take notes even if the lecturer gives handouts. Making notes helps you:

- Actively engage with the information being presented
- Increase your understanding of the topic
- Include information that lecturer says that isn't in the handouts such as introductory comments, repeated information, and notes on the board. You do not have to write in complete sentences but make sure you include enough information so your notes make sense in future. Try to develop a logical framework, using headings and subheadings.

After the lecture:

If possible, review your notes the same day while the lecture is fresh in your memory. Question yourself about your understanding of the material and identify any areas of confusion. Ask your lecturers and tutors for help.

How We Can Help with Your Assignment

Become a confident, independent writer and editor

- We can help you to analyse your assignment topic and get started.
- We can offer advice on how to organise your ideas into a logical and cohesive structure.
- We will work with you on a sample of your writing (one or two pages) to provide feedback and to identify areas for improvement such as grammar, punctuation, or spelling.
- We will suggest strategies to help you check your own writing.
- We can point you to resources to help you develop your writing skills.

For advice on writing or editing, please bring to your appointment:

- A copy of the assignment or question or topic
 - A print-out of your draft (two pages will be sufficient).
- Before your appointment, please carefully check your grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Highlight any points you are unsure of.

For advice on structure please bring:

- A copy of the assignment or question or topic
- An outline of your plan or a first draft

We do not check entire assignments. However, we are keen to help you develop self-editing skills and strategies to improve your writing style.

To make an appointment, please email hedc.studentlearning@otago.ac.nz or come into reception at the Student Learning Development office beside the ID card office and library in the ISB building.

How Else Can Student Learning Development Help?

SLD offers workshops, online resources, consultation support, and peer learning programmes to first year students and beyond. For more information, email hedc.studentlearning@otago.ac.nz

- **Workshops**

Undergraduate workshops include: time management, reading for understanding, essay writing, presentation skills, & exam revision.

- **Resources**

As mentioned previously, SLD has many online resources for topics such as study, writing, and presentations. These resources are also available in hard copy at the SLD office in the ISB building near the ID card office.

- **Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS)**

PASS are group-based study sessions led by an experienced student who has successfully completed the course. These 50-minute sessions start on the second week of classes. In the sessions you will get the chance to revise course material as a group through interactive activities and discussions.

- **Peer writers**

Peer writers help undergraduate students to:

- Unpack the assignment question
- Plan/structure your assignment
- Grammar and punctuation
- Sentence and paragraph structure

- **English Conversation Group**

English conversation groups occur three times a week and are a great opportunity to ask language and culture-related questions in a safe environment as well as providing a chance to meet others trying to improve their English. Englishlanguage.peersupport@otago.ac.nz

SLD Staff Contact List

The Student Learning Development office is located on the ground floor of the Information Services Building by the ID card office and the library.

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