

# Adjusting your study habits for learning online

The world is a very different place than it was a few short weeks ago. It's okay to feel uncertain about everything at the moment, and it's okay to be unsure about what to do.

You've put so much hard work into the year already and have learnt so much – keep it up! The staff at the University of Otago are here to support you, help you stay connected and help you succeed with your studies at this very strange time.

Use the resources provided in this guide as a starting point.

We may all be learning, teaching, studying and working apart from one another now, but we'll get through this together.

## Find out what's happening with your papers

Things will have changed. Take a moment to figure out what those changes will mean for you.

Check on Blackboard or the departmental student platform for each of your papers to see how they will be handling teaching.

Teaching staff are still working and are there to support your learning so check the paper communications to find out what they are doing (check your paper outline for how your paper will communicate with you if needed).

Check your online paper information each weekday to see what is happening. If you have any questions or challenges contact your paper co-ordinator. Some papers might let you contact the lecturers directly, so make sure you have their emails if they've been provided to you. Others will ask you to post on discussion boards, so make good use of that resource.

## Get into your study routine

Planning your day is the best way to get into a study routine.

Set up a "normal" study timetable across the week, noting when you plan to watch lectures, do readings, complete labs, tutorial work or assignments. Spread out your lectures, complete any preparation tasks, block out a period of time to complete labs and tutorials. Use a digital calendar, like in Office 365, or the one on your phone. Add reminders to keep you to your routine.

It's a great time to try the [Pomodoro method of study](#) for effective study. Or look at [Student Learning Development](#) to improve your academic skills.

Some of your papers will stick to the original timetable, releasing resources such as podcasts in line with when lectures are scheduled. Others may make a block of content available at once. When learning online it can be tempting to rush through the resources without engaging with them. But, it's important to give your brain time to process the information, so pace yourself and stick to a "normal" study timetable.

## Check you've got what you need

Ask yourself the following questions so you are ready to start online study:

- Have I checked the new requirements for my papers?
- Do I have access to a computer (or tablet)?
- Do I have good internet speed and lots of data available?
- Do I have the software I need for my studies?
- Am I regularly checking my student email?
- Am I regularly checking my paper information online?
- Can I download files and access links to external resources that are provided?

If not, look at IT resources on the [COVID-19 information for students webpage](#) or the distance section of the [Student IT blog](#).

*Tip: if you can, plug your computer directly into your modem router with an Ethernet cable for better connectivity.*

You can also get in touch with AskOtago if having access problems but do let your paper co-ordinator know of any limitations you might have – this is important.

## AskOtago

Freephone 0800 808 098 (within NZ)

Tel +64 3 479 7000

Email [university@otago.ac.nz](mailto:university@otago.ac.nz)

Web [otago.custhelp.com](http://otago.custhelp.com)

You can still access many University of Otago resources from home:

- [The Library and its subject guides and past exams](#)
- [Journal databases and Google Scholar](#)

## What to study

Continue to follow the learning objectives set for each paper.

Don't get distracted by the concepts you're learning either! It can be easy to fall into an information spiral if a topic particularly interests you. It's great to be curious and to want to know more, but try to keep thinking about what you're required to know for your paper.

## Set up your workspace

Wherever you may find yourself living during the lockdown, you need to set up a dedicated study space.

If you can't have one dedicated space, try and find some other way to separate your study time from your personal time. This might be listening to particular music or wearing a 'work/study' outfit.

Even if you have a decent workspace, it's easy to become distracted while studying from home. These tips might help:

- Turn off notifications on your phone, put it on silent, 'do not disturb', in flight mode, or even leave it in another room.
- Only have open apps and webpages you need for study.
- Use headphones to stop others from distracting you (and you from distracting others).
- Put up a 'do not disturb, I'm studying' sign on your door while you're studying, so others in your household know that you're busy.
- Don't study in the same place as game consoles if you can help it.
- Schedule time during your day to play or watch TV if it's the sort of thing you'll find hard to avoid when you should be studying.

## Keep on top of things

In your stay-at-home-bubble, it will be very easy to avoid work and then get behind.

Every lecture you don't watch is another hour to catch up with, and that can start to feel like too much very quickly. Think of the coming weeks as a marathon – you want to keep up at a steady pace, rather than having to do a mad sprint right at the end.

## Stay in touch

Learning is not a solo event.

It's important to stay connected with your peers and your lecturers. Look at the discussion board for your paper. Check it regularly, and post any questions you have. Don't be shy – if you have questions, chances are your classmates will have the same question. Staff are always happy to provide clarification if there are concepts or ideas you don't understand, so post a question.

Stay in touch with peers if you can and make small study groups. A WhatsApp chat, or a Zoom meeting with other students going through the same thing, in the same paper, can help you feel less isolated and keep you on track.

## Use resources effectively

### Learning online is different.

The motivation and drive needs to come from you, and the responsibility for your learning sits more on your shoulders. Your papers may provide you with additional resources to help you with this – make good use of whatever is provided to you.

#### Podcasts

Watch them like you would a lecture. Watch them at normal speed, and take notes throughout. You might have asked questions during face-to-face lectures, and be frustrated you can't do that now. Do make sure you follow up on anything you're unsure of. This is part of the learning process. There is the textbook, paper resources, online discussion boards and/or contacting your lecturer (if permitted).

#### Labs

You will be unable to be in the physical laboratory space, which means some experiments may not be possible. Watch any videos, read any material provided and engage with any online lab activities. Make sure you continue to fill in answers in your lab book (and if you didn't bring it home with you, check if your paper provides an electronic version, or ask if this can be made available). If lab answers are provided, make sure you attempt to work through the activities first, and just use the answers to check your understanding.

#### Tutorials

You may be expected to attend these online through Zoom or a similar mechanism, so it's important to schedule this into your timetable and let your tutor know if you are unavailable. Or you may be provided with tutorial resources to work through on your own. Make sure you set aside time to do this.

#### Homework

Make sure you do homework to help you stay on top of things. Often this work is to prepare you for upcoming content, or to check your understanding of what you have already been taught.

#### Self-assessment

Some of your internal assessments may have changed. They may have been cancelled, turned into formative (don't contribute to final grade), or changed in format. For some papers this means that a higher percentage of the grade will be on later assessments or the final exam. As you study, keep this in mind. Test your knowledge regularly to see what areas you need to study. You can also:

- Turn the learning objectives into a set of exam questions, then answer them.
- Access past exam papers from the Library website and practice these.
- Work with classmates to write your own questions and share them with each other.

## Get ready for exams

### Start planning ahead for exams.

Use the information and advice provided in this guide to help prepare effectively for study. Look at Blackboard, UNIO101: Getting started at Otago, for exam study tips. Exam arrangements may be different than when your paper began.

Check your paper's information on Blackboard or departmental student platform to find out about these changes over the next few weeks. Make sure you understand how assessments are going to be handled and make a study plan that aligns with the exam format and your goals.

## Keeping yourself well

Now that we are in lockdown, you need to look after your well-being. You may be isolating physically but you should still communicate regularly with your friends and family.

### Get into a routine

At first, this might be a bit difficult. There are probably other things taking your attention right now. But a normal routine is important for our general well-being.

Getting up at your normal time, eating at usual times, and getting plenty of sleep – it all helps to keep you well. Making exercise a part of your routine is also an excellent idea. There are more resources than ever online to help you stay active.

### Try something new

- Start a hobby or get back into an old one.
- Learn to play or practice an instrument.
- Try out new recipes and baking.
- Learn a language (download Duolingo).
- Try a new series.
- Re-read your favourite book.

### Look after yourself, friends and whānau

Be kind to yourself, your friends and whānau.

Student Health is still available for well-being appointments made via email (student-health@otago.ac.nz) and held on Zoom if you need.

There's plenty of advice on keeping well on the [Ministry of Health website](#).

There are regular updates from the University on its [COVID-19 website](#).

Make sure you also keep checking your student email.

*“Manaaki whenua, manaaki tangata, haere whakamua”*  
Care for the land, care for the people, go forward

