

Preparing For Your First Year at University



Strategies for Maximising Your Success

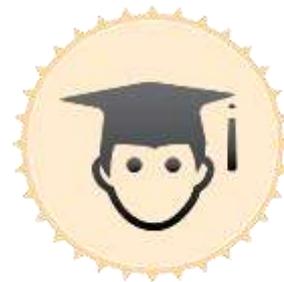
**Student Learning Development
University of Otago**

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 website.

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

Version 1.1 2016

Getting Started at Uni



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

Explore your new environment

Entering University can be like entering a foreign country. Both experiences can lead to ‘culture shock’ with associated 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. Take a library tour, wander around the campus, make contact with departments, and find out about the various sections of the University and their functions. Familiarise yourself as much as possible with this strange new world; it’s up to you to inform yourself.

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. There is a lot of help provided for you at university so make sure you know what is available, where to go, and who to ask for assistance.

Use the *My Otago First Year* website:

<http://www.otago.ac.nz/mofy/index.html>

Check out the *For Current Students* tab on the University of Otago website homepage or make an appointment to talk with us at the Student Learning Development office.

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 be able to chat about lectures, tutorials, and assignments, and to discuss tutorial or laboratory problems. Discussion with others is also an important part of the learning process and this can be as valuable over coffee or lunch as in the tutorial room. Many others will also be new to the university environment; so don’t be afraid to chat to the people in your courses.

Join a peer support programme

If you are an international student, the international office has mentoring and language-match programmes available for you. The Maori and Pacific Island centres have peer-mentoring programmes, and Student Learning Development supports the “Locals” programme for first-year students not residing in a residential college. Come into the

Student Learning Development office or email us for more information regarding any of these support networks.

Balance work and play

It's important to find time in your busy student schedule for social and leisure activities. The University offers programmes and equipment on a whole range of hobbies, social events, and sports. Check out what's available at Recreation Services, Unipol and OUSA Clubs and Societies.

'Tune in' to course work

Make sure that you read through the course handouts and guidelines for each of your papers as soon as you get them to get a sense of the 'big picture'. Know what the learning outcomes are for each paper and use these as a guide to help organise and prioritise your study. Make lecture and tutorial attendance a priority. Prepare for lectures by doing the background reading and prep required for each lecture so that you are off to a good start in terms of understanding the topic and recognising key points during the lecture itself. This in turn will help you to make more useful and meaningful notes. Also, prepare for your tutorials by completing the prescribed reading and set tasks.

Employ effective study and learning approaches

Part of adapting successfully into a new environment is to feel that you are in control. At university, this includes being able to manage the workload and meeting assignment deadlines. You will need to be as effective as possible in your reading, writing, note-taking, time management and exam preparation. Student Learning Development offers workshops and individual assistance in all these areas and more. Staff can help you to identify your current learning styles and study approaches, assist you to build on your strengths, and adapt or change your current practices where necessary.

Academic and social support

The University provides a huge array of support, details of which you will find in a number of locations including the University's web site, the Prospectus, the OUSA, and Student Learning Development.

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.
- I know who the course coordinators/tutors/administrators are in all my courses (in case you need to get information or help).
- I have contact details of the people to get help from in all my courses (e.g. tutors).
- 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 the lectures/tutorials/labs/workshops/screenings provided by my courses.
- Before* lectures, I have done the required/recommended readings for all of my classes (these will help you to make more sense of classes and make note-taking easier).
- 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 reading or web resources that have been recommended in the course.
- 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 on-line resources).
- Every week I spend an appropriate amount of focused time on my coursework.

It is never too late to turn 'no' answers into 'yes' answers. Remember that part of your learning is learning how to be a university student. So, what can you do to turn 'No' into 'Yes'?

- Ask questions of your lecturers, tutors, college RAs and other students
- Visit the Student Learning Development website and check out our study skills resources: <http://sld.otago.ac.nz/find-online-resources/>
- Enrol for one of our study skills workshops: <http://sld.otago.ac.nz/attend-a-workshop/>
- Make an appointment to get advice from the staff at Student Learning Development: <http://sld.otago.ac.nz/talk-to-a-learning-adviser/>
- Check out our peer-assisted study sessions (PASS): <http://sld.otago.ac.nz/attend-a-pass-session/>
- If you are new to Uni, not in a college or you are a mature student, see: <http://sld.otago.ac.nz/new-to-otago/>

Making the Most of Your Notes



1. Taking notes in lectures

Before the Lecture:

Even if it is just a quick overview, make sure you have looked at your readings (these are often available in your course materials on Blackboard). The lecture itself will then be the second time you encounter the information and so you should be able to recognise key concepts and have some understanding of the topics underlying structure, as well as how everything fits into the “bigger picture” of your paper.

During the lecture:

Even if the lecturer gives you a handout, it is still important to take notes.

- To actively engage with the information being presented
- To help you to concentrate and to focus your thinking
- To increase your understanding of the topic
- Because the lecturer will include useful and interesting information that is not in the handout

Listen actively and pay special attention to:

- Introductory comments as these provide important information about the lecture.
- Any material emphasised by the lecturer (e.g. through repetition; change in voice tone; physical gestures; notes on board; comments such as, “this is really significant” or, “this might come up in the exam”). Mark these in your notes to indicate their importance.

You don’t need to write down everything the lecturer says and don’t worry about trying to write complete sentences. Do note key points with enough information so that your notes make sense to you when you look at them again in the future.

As you take notes, try to develop a logical framework e.g., use headings and subheadings for main and secondary points, lettering or numbering for showing sequence and priority.

After the lecture:

If possible, it is best to review your notes the same day while the lecture is fresh in your memory.

When you review your notes, don’t laboriously re-write everything neatly. Instead, read them through and question yourself about your understanding of the material. Identify any areas of confusion or where you need more information, and then refer back to your texts and handouts to clarify your understanding. (If after reviewing your notes and

readings you still have questions or are unsure about material ask your tutor or lecturer for help.)

Have a look at Student Learning Development's *Note-taking from lectures* table in the Notes Supplement. You might also like to try the Cornell note taking method: http://lsc.cornell.edu/LSC_Resources/cornellsystem.pdf

There are many variations on these themes. If the ideas so far don't appeal, try doing a YouTube search for 'note taking'. There are numerous short videos which explain different techniques. The thing they all have in common is getting you to listen actively during lectures and then revisit key questions, ideas, evidence and conclusions right after lectures. Find a technique that works for you and stick to it.

Often it's helpful to expand your lecture notes using additional information from labs, tutorials, textbooks and other sources. When expanding your notes, devise a system to differentiate between direct quotes and your own words (e.g. put in the margin quote marks or large "Q", "me" or "mine". Make sure you record the author, name of the publication, and the page number/s of all your sources, so that if you need to look up this information again later, you can.

You should also review your notes regularly. Identify key concepts and quiz yourself about them. How much can you remember?

2. Making notes from the readings

Course readings are a major source from which you will gather information about a particular topic. Your lecturer will have emphasised important aspects of the topic based on the same readings.

First, think about why you are making the notes. Don't just decide to read and take notes from a chapter or article without knowing what you are going to do with them.

Are the notes you are making preparation for a lecture, an assignment, revision for an exam, to explore a topic, or to gain a quick overview of the topic. The purpose will determine the depth and breadth of the information you need to take down as well as the form your notes should take.

Read and take notes in manageable chunks (what is "manageable" will be different for each person). Summarise what you have read in your own words, then read another chunk, and so on. To use your time effectively, pay attention and focus on your readings; otherwise you may end up needing to re-read material.

There are a variety of ways to note information from reading materials: writing a summary, bullet pointing important ideas, mapping out concepts, or using tables (have a look at Student Learning Development's *Note-taking from readings* table in the Notes Supplement). Some students find it really useful to form their notes into a concept map.

Concept Maps:

To aid with engagement, understanding, and recall, many students find it helpful to arrange notes into a concept map. Creating a visual representation of a single lecture, article, book or entire course can aid learning in a number of ways:

- It stimulates your brain, gets you interested
- It gets you to process and engage actively with ideas and information
- It helps you to sift out and spot central ideas and key concepts
- It helps you to identify relationships/links between ideas and information
- It gives you an overview of the “big picture”
- It gives you a useful tool for assignment preparation and exam revision

Be creative in your maps—use colours, small drawings, and symbols such as ticks, crosses, and circles to show categories, hierarchies, connections, and relationships. Try searching YouTube for ‘concept maps’ for ideas to get you started.

Remember, the better your notes are the more useful they will be to you. During exam time if you have already created a good set of notes then you have essential material at hand and ready for exam revision.

How We Can Help With Your Assignment



Become a confident, independent writer and editor

- We can help you to analyse your assignment topic and to get started.
- We can offer advice on how to organise your ideas and information 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 assist you to 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

What we do not do:

You will appreciate that we cannot edit/check your entire assignment for grammatical or spelling errors. However, we are keen to help you develop self-editing skills and strategies to improve your writing style.

We also recommend that you peer-edit your work with a fellow student who has to write the same assignment. Peer-editing means that you read each other's work, and provide comments, as well as point out grammatical and spelling mistakes. You may even want to do this with more than one fellow student. The benefits are that someone else checks your work and perhaps suggests some changes, and you will also see how other students approach the same task.

To make an appointment, please email hedc.studentlearning@otago.ac.nz or come into reception at the Student Learning Development office.

How Else Can Student Learning Development Help?

Student Learning Development offers workshops, resources, consultations support and peer learning programmes to first year students and beyond. Below is a list of specific workshops, resources and peer learning programmes that are useful for first year students.

Workshops

Register for Student Learning Development workshops online at:
<http://sld.otago.ac.nz/attend-a-workshop/>



Workshops for First Year students include:

Study skills workshops

- Note-taking
- Time Management
- Reading for Understanding
- Mind Mapping, Design Jam
- Presentation Skills
- Academic Integrity
- Exam Revision Skills

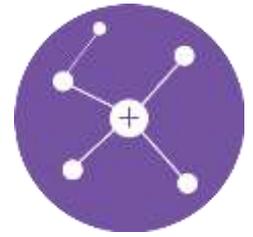
Writing and language workshops

- Writing Your First Assignment
- Writing Better Sentences and Paragraphs
- Essay Writing
- Summarising and Paraphrasing
- Essays for Exams

Resources

Pick up a hard copy of our resources at the Student Learning Development office in the Information Services Building (near where you received your Student ID card), or access online resources at:

<http://sld.otago.ac.nz/find-online-resources/>



Study skills resources

- Are you looking for the answer?
- Balancing your workplace, study and home
- Checklists for effective study
- Exam checklist
- Exams: Go for Gold
- Forming a study group
- Getting started at Uni
- How we can help with your assignment
- Making the most of your notes
- Motivation matters
- Not doing as well as you expected?
- Time management
- What can I do to become a more successful student?
- What can I do to prepare for exams?

Writing, language and presentations resources

- Guidelines for writing and editing
- How can I get a better mark for my essay?
- How can I improve my use of the English language?
- Introduction to scientific writing
- Planning and writing assignments
- Preparing for a presentation
- What is referencing and why is it important?
- Effective reading
- Quoting, paraphrasing and summarising
- Preparing for a presentation assignment
- Colons and semi-colons
- Tenses without the tension
- The dreaded apostrophe
- The quirky comma
- Writing a reflective journal
- Writing an exegesis

Peer learning programmes

Register for PASS at: <http://sld.otago.ac.nz/attend-a-pass-session/>

Or find out more about Peer Writers at:

<http://sld.otago.ac.nz/writing-language/>



Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS):

Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) are fun group-based study sessions led by an experienced student who has successfully completed the course. These 50 minute sessions are every week from week 2 to week 13 of both semesters. Each week in your PASS session you'll get the chance to revise course material as a group through interactive activities and discussions. PASS is offered for the following papers:

- BIOC192
- BSNS111
- BSNS112
- BSNS113
- BSNS114
- BSNS115
- CELS191
- CHEM191
- EAOS111
- GEOL112
- HEAL192
- HUBS191
- HUBS191
- LAWS101
- MANT101
- MART112
- MATH160
- PSYC111
- PSYC112
- STAT110
- STAT115
- PHSE191
- PHSE192
- PHSI191

Peer writers

Studying at 100 level and need some help with your assignment? You can get help from a senior student on:

- Unpacking the assignment question
- Planning/structuring your assignment
- Grammar and punctuation
- Sentence and paragraph structure

To use this service come into reception to book a one-on-one appointment with a peer writer send an email to hedc.studentlearning@otago.ac.nz or drop into the Student Learning Development office for a quick 15 minute appointment. Drop in times will be announced online in the first week of semester at:

<http://sld.otago.ac.nz/writing-language/>

SLD Staff Contact List

The Student Learning Development office is located on the ground floor of the Information Services Building (central library building) in the south-west corner (near where you pick up your student ID card).

Student Learning Development Reception

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