

Making the transition from A-Levels (or equivalent) to university-

Top 5 tips on how to prepare yourself before you go

Preparing to go to university can be daunting, but there are things you can do to prepare yourself.

1. Studying independently



At university, you aren't chased up as much for attendance or submitting assignments, so a big part of adjusting is figuring out how to motivate yourself to get things done on your own and taking personal responsibility for your work. University academics (your teachers) will introduce you to key knowledge but will not chase you up. Take ownership of your learning and make sure you're familiar with the course structure, assessments and your timetable so you can prepare accordingly.

At university, you're also given a lot more freedom over your own learning, so you're able to decide on things like which modules you want to study as part of your course, which resources to use to research a certain topic, and what subject you would like to do your dissertation on. You will be supported with this, but ultimately the choice comes down to you.

2. Teaching methods

As well as assessment, teaching can change at uni. You may learn amongst big groups in lectures, or smaller numbers than you are used to in seminars. Lectures are usually introductory, with less opportunity for questions, whilst seminars are for researching and discussing individual areas in depth. You may also get access to laboratories, software or equipment that you haven't used before, which can be an exciting part of studying at a higher level.



Group work is often a big part of university study and can be a really useful way of learning that will prepare you for the future. You may be assigned a project or presentation which you need to complete as a group, with each member participating in different ways. You will be assessed and graded as a group, so it is important you are able to work effectively in this way.

3. Assessments



Assessment can be very different at university. Firstly, the grading system is different, so rather than being awarded letter grades (A, B, C, etc.) or single number grades (9, 8, 7, etc), you're given an overall mark out of 100. It is very rare to get 100% at university level, so the top classification (a 1st class mark) is anything

over 70. Over 60 is a 2:1 (upper second class), over 50 is a 2:2 (lower second class), and over 40 is a 3rd. Anything under 40 is a fail. Universities will usually give formative (mock) assessments before you are assessed in the summative (real) assessment. All of these assessments will add up to give you an average at the end of the year, and at the end of the course, which will give you your overall degree classification.

Assessments themselves can take different forms at university. As well as traditional exams and coursework, you may have open book exams, online quizzes, take home exams, assessed presentations or performances, lab practicals, or be assessed on a piece of work (e.g. a film or a piece of software, or an industry-related project). A lot depends on the course you take, but pay attention to how you're assessed and the weight of each assessment for your subject.

4. Finding resources & referencing

As we mentioned earlier, university opens up lots of options and ways of researching areas of your subject. However, it is crucial that you are able to critically engage with the material. Rather than just recall or understand information, your assessments will require you to consider sources and evidence and come to your own opinion.

A big part of competent academic writing is attributing your sources. Courses and universities have different preferences, but be aware of [what referencing is](#) and why it is important!



On a more practical level, you will need to be able to find physical resources in libraries, and access online resources. Research how your university's libraries are organised- are there specific buildings for specific subjects and how do you find books and articles? Does the library use the Dewey decimal system or another method of categorisation? For online resources, is there an online search engine or directory? Can this be accessed off campus? You will be supported with this when you arrive- make sure you take advantage of the support that is out there if you're having trouble!

A handy tip before you start- don't buy all the books from your reading list. They will be available in the Library and some of the people on the course may lend/sell them to you!

5. Managing your time



University is not just about studying... you need to balance it with a healthy social life, maybe a part time job, volunteering and work experience, exercise, sports and societies, not to mention eating and sleeping! An average undergraduate year comprises 1200 hours of learning which works out as about 45 hours of work per term-time week, so you need to make sure that you are able to plan your time and track deadlines and your timetable.

Different ways work for different people- so use this time to work out how you would like to manage your time at university- some people will prefer a diary or bullet journal, others will use an online calendar or app.

Remember...

You're not expected to be perfect when you get to university, so one of the best things you can do is know where you can go for support and be able to recognise when you need help with something. Don't be too hard on yourself! University is a big change so give yourself time to adapt if you don't figure everything out straight away.

Further reading

<https://www.studentminds.org.uk/transitionintouniversity.html>

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/advice/student-blog-what-expect-university>