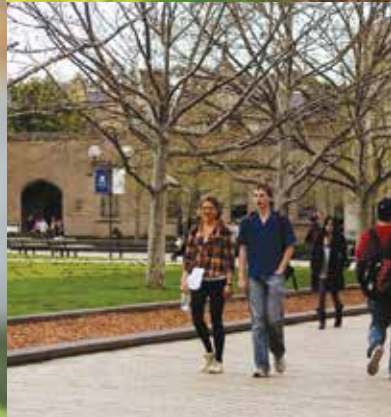




THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Study in Australia

The Study Abroad Student's Guide to Success





First published in 2002

Second edition 2013

© 2013 Academic Skills, University of Melbourne

Web: <http://services.unimelb.edu.au/academicskills>

Email: academic-skills@unimelb.edu.au

First edition by Aveline Pérez

This edition by Stephen Campitelli and Steven Thurlow



Studying in Australia:

The Study Abroad Student's Guide to Success

An academic guide for Study Abroad and Exchange Students at the University of Melbourne
Second Edition

Academic Skills
The University of Melbourne

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Studying in Australia: what to expect | 1 |
| The Australian university system | |
| A new learning environment | |
| Types of classes | |
| Studying at Melbourne | |
| Organisational structure | |
| Assessment and grades | |
| Getting help and getting involved | |
| 2. First Appearances: interpreting social values in Australian education | 8 |
| The value of appearing equal yet independent | |
| Attitudes to authority and rules | |
| Decision making and argumentation | |
| Attitudes to work and play | |
| The art of making friends | |
| Working together at uni: collaborative learning | |
| Dealing with homesickness and culture shock | |
| 3. Getting started: balancing study with leisure | 14 |
| Managing your commitments: Making a study timetable | |
| Australian classes: how much study should I do? | |
| Consider your study environment | |
| Motivation: how to stay enthusiastic all semester | |
| 4. Tips to Maximise your Study Success | 19 |
| Reading | |
| Listening and note-taking | |
| Speaking | |
| Writing | |
| Research resources | |
| Creating your own assignment question | |
| Australian academic writing style | |
| 5. Studying for Exams | 32 |
| Exam preparation essentials | |
| Question preparation | |
| Tips for exam day | |
| Dealing with nerves | |
| Help if you need it | |
| 6. Heading Home | 37 |

1. STUDYING IN AUSTRALIA: WHAT TO EXPECT



The Australian university system

Welcome to Australia and to the University of Melbourne! We hope your time here will add more fun, friends, academic stimulation and travel experiences to your life. By electing to study with us, you have joined a small but distinguished cohort at the University. In 2011, there were over one thousand Study Abroad and Exchange students from more than thirty-five countries, the majority being from North America and Europe.

Like most Study Abroad and Exchange students you are probably only here for a short stay and need to adapt quickly. You may think there is not much difference between your home and Australia (particularly if you are from the USA, Canada or Northern/Western Europe). However, you will come across many subtle and often surprising differences, and making sense of them can be difficult.

Look out for the words of wisdom from our past Study Abroad students

In fact, adjusting to the Australian education system may be even more difficult for Study Abroad students than for other international students. This book aims to help you with some of the exciting challenges you might face, and directs you to people and services that can support you.

Study Abroad students are sometimes called the 'hidden international students'. It may be assumed that if you speak English, you won't need any extra help adjusting to Australian culture. While Australians do speak English, it does take time to learn Australian English, particularly the slang and colloquial expressions scattered throughout Aussie speech.

To help you learn a few fun expressions, highlighted words will appear throughout this book symbolising the use of an Australian idiom. So when you go home at the end of your studies, you can impress your family and friends with a few fair dinkum (genuine) Australianisms!

There is a saying in Australia: "to give someone **the good oil**" This means giving advice or accurate information. Here we give you the good oil on how the university system works, so you will know what to expect. You'll find out who is who, what types of classes you may be placed into, how your subjects will be assessed and how you are expected to manage your own learning.

So, why do you need this book?

Apart from the issues above, Study Abroad students consistently identify the following as the most challenging aspects of their academic work in Australia:

1. More unscheduled class time than at home
2. The need to be more self-directed learners
3. Less individualised attention from academic staff
4. More active discussion in tutorials
5. A more argumentative, and less descriptive style, of writing for essays and exams
6. A different approach to grading assignments. For example, there may be fewer, more heavily-weighted pieces of assessment at the end of semester rather than on a regular basis throughout the semester

The tips and techniques offered in this book are based on the experience of many Study Abroad students who were enrolled in a variety of courses here at UoM. We hope their insights will better prepare you for your stay here.

Even though we have very little contact hours with the lecturer, I must say that the workload is just as heavy as what I have back home, It's just that you are left to do your own readings and you have to be really independent. If you procrastinate, that's your problem.

Susana, Canada

This book

For students visiting Australia, a common observation is that everyone appears more 'laid back' than at home. The pace of life seems slower, and academic demands may initially appear to be less. However, this means that you may not receive as much instruction about what to do and when to do it as you would like. This book will help you to stay on track by providing information on:

What to expect before you arrive

Understanding and managing the Australian university system is important. Knowing how it is structured, who does what, who to seek help from and how to negotiate the system will save you time and stress.

How to interact within the Australian education system

Knowing what your teachers expect from you is important for achieving good grades and, apart from befriending Australian students, you may also have to complete group assignments with them. Therefore, by learning a little about Australian social values, you'll be able to manage your educational interactions more smoothly.

How to organise an effective study program

The Australian education system provides more 'free' hours than you may be used to at home. While you may be tempted to spend this time exploring your new home, your teachers' expectations are that you're working independently at your own pace to prepare for your classes and working on assignments. You need to manage your time and study commitments, and be effective in your reading, note taking, and class performance. We'll help you to study efficiently – so you will work hard and then have plenty of time to play hard too!

How to cope with different assessment procedures

With assignments and exams that could carry a greater percentage towards your final grade, you want to make sure you get it right the first time. We'll guide you to an understanding of the expectations of assessment at the University of Melbourne.

The way Australian universities operate stems from Australia's colonial background. Many of the organisational structures are based on the English education system and reflect the political and social development of Australia over the last 220 years. Some key points include:

**Back home in all my classes
you're able to get to know the
professor on a first name basis,
but here, in most of them, I was
just a face in the crowd...**

Jared, USA

A new learning environment

Many students find studying in Australia more casual than in their home country. While the learning environment may appear casual (for example, teachers first names are used in the classroom), academics expect respect from their students, and their knowledge and experience allows them the final word on the quality of your submitted work.

You may hear the term 'independent learning' used in reference to the Australian higher education system. This means that you are responsible for completing the set reading, undertaking any further research and finishing any required tasks. It is unlikely that staff will personally inquire about your progress in a subject, or question your non-attendance at classes or non-submission of work. If you don't ask any questions, it will be assumed that you have no problems. So, it's all up to you to keep track of your commitments. Independent learning allows you freedom in your study, but also requires constant monitoring of your own academic progress.

Lectures, tutorials, laboratories, and practical classes are the most typical ways to present information in Australian universities. In Australia, as in your home country, you will experience a variety of teaching styles, methods, format and size of classes. For example, in lectures some staff will simply 'lecture', others will incorporate discussion and small group work. Most lecturers will use audio-visual aids, such as PowerPoint or Prezi. In some subjects, students run the classes, while the tutor facilitates.

The Australian Higher Education system is largely a public government funded industry with only a few private universities.

- Universities offer Bachelor degrees in many areas. These are usually 3–4 years in length (although some vocational degrees such as medicine, law and engineering may be longer). Double degrees (such as Arts/Law) are also popular.
- Many disciplines offer an optional Honours year for undergraduate students. This additional year usually requires advanced coursework and a minor thesis. Master's and Doctoral degrees are taken either by coursework or research. Both undergraduate and postgraduate courses are offered at the same universities.
- Universities are divided into Faculties, such as Science, Arts, Law, etc. Departments/Schools are organised within faculties corresponding to the disciplines taught (Politics, History, Literature, etc.).
- The Australian university teaching year is usually divided into two semesters (March – June, and July/August – November). These usually include 12 weeks of classes, with a short break (non-teaching week) dividing each semester (in Semester One, this usually coincides with the Easter break). At the end of each semester there is a 'SWOT Vac' (or study period) and a 2–3 week examination period. There is usually a four to six week winter break between semesters, and a three month summer holiday between years.

Australian Universities

Australia's 39 universities together have an enrolment of more than one million students, and employ more than 100,000 staff. University expenditure accounts for 1.5% of GDP, with significant spill-over benefits for students, staff, industry, and the wider community. With 10 Nobel Prizes to date, Australia is also one of the world's leading research nations on a per capita basis. Although less than half a per cent of the world's population, Australia accounts for nearly three per cent of the world's research output.

Source: Universities Australia website [<http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/page/australia-s-universities/>, accessed 14 Nov 2011]

Types of classes

Lectures

Lectures are usually given weekly for subjects you are enrolled in. They are usually just under one hour in length. Lectures can have between 30 and 300 people in attendance so student/lecturer interaction is minimal. The lecturer will present theoretical information and provide relevant examples relating to core concepts in the subject. Administrative and assessment information is sometimes presented during lectures too. Lecturers will not know all their students' names and in most classes no attendance record is kept. There are no special seating arrangements but if you sit near the front of the lecture hall, obviously it is going to be easier to see and hear what's going on!

Tutorials / seminars

Most subjects also have tutorials (abbreviated to 'tutes') or seminar classes. Tutes are usually groups of 15-20 students discussing content and issues related to the lectures and accompanying readings. They could be an hour or ninety minutes in length. These classes are more informal than the lectures and encourage interaction, questioning and an opportunity to clarify your understanding of the lecture content and/or readings. In the best tutes everyone participates. It is vital that you attend your tutes well prepared and willing to participate.

Seminars

Seminars are when students present content material to the tutorial class and could be part of the overall assessment for a subject. They could also last longer than tutorials. Both seminars and tutorials can also be a lot of fun as they provide the opportunity to get to know other students.

Labs/pracs

In laboratory classes ('labs') or practical classes ('pracs'), you will work through the procedure of an experiment that is related to the lecture material. Adequate preparation for labs enhances efficient learning and ensures safety, particularly when dealing with dangerous chemicals or using complex procedures. Laboratory reports may be required at the end of the session or beginning of the next session. Lab work is often completed in small groups, thus good team-work skills are necessary to complete the work on time. Pracs/labs usually run for two to three hours.

Online learning

Most of your study in the uni will be face-to-face in small or large groups. However, many subjects require students to use the online-based resources for assignments or for tutorial or practical work. The LMS (Learning Management System) is the University of Melbourne's online space where students can find subject requirements, assessment information, staff contact details, subject readings and lecture documents plus a range of tools that can facilitate group and individual work including discussion forums, wikis, blogs, audio recordings and tests. Some assessments may be LMS-based, e.g. you might get marks for a blog or group or online group work. The LMS is accessed from the main Student Portal or via the LMS web site.

For independent study, there are many student computer labs available around campus, although they get busy during assessment time. You might want to bring your own laptop computer to Australia although don't forget that you may need an adaptor in order to charge it. There is free access to the University's WiFi network on campus.

At UoM you will be provided with an e-mail account. Messages and bulletins are often sent to students in a particular subject via these e-mail accounts. If you are using a free internet account (like Hotmail or Gmail), make sure you redirect your Uni email to this account, or you could miss out on vital information. The introductory lectures or course information for each of your subjects will inform you what online communication will be used during the course.

Studying at Melbourne

What's different about studying at the University of Melbourne?

After a recent restructure of its curricula, the courses now offered by UoM are different from many other Australian universities. Here, students begin with an undergraduate degree that consists of three years of full-time study. Six 'new generation' degrees are offered which cover more than 80 major fields of study. All these degrees require students to take a quarter of their subjects from outside their immediate core subject areas. These **breadth** subjects allow students to develop knowledge outside their specific discipline area. After completing undergraduate study, students can continue their studies into a range of graduate programs including professional entry and professional development degrees.

The marking system was a bit difficult to adjust to. It's quite difficult to get that H1 (80+), they're much rarer here.

Fredrik, Germany

UoM Fast Facts

The University has 19 faculties and Graduate Schools, 6500 staff members and more than 47 000 students. There are more than 11 800 international students from over 120 countries. It is the second oldest University in Australia, after the University of Sydney, opening its doors in 1855 with four professors, 4 faculties and 16 students.

Source: University of Melbourne: Future Students [<http://www.futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/explore/about>, accessed 31 Jan 2012]

Organisational structure

Universities are large, complex organisations and UoM is no exception! The organisational chart below details some of the main 'actors' at University, although you may not come across all of these while studying here.

WHO'S WHO AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Vice-Chancellor

The university's Chief Executive Officer. Supported by an upper management team of Deputy Vice Chancellors, Vice-Principals, etc.

Dean of Faculty

Manages all aspects of the Faculty.

Head of Department / School

A senior academic (Professor) who attends to the academic and administrative issues in the Department / School. There are many Departments / Schools in each Faculty.

Lecturer

A senior academic member of staff who lectures and often tutors within a Department. May coordinate and teach several subjects, carry out research and supervise post-graduate student research.

Tutor

Conducts tutorials and seminars. Often teaches in a number of related subjects. May be completing a PhD and be undertaking research as part of this degree. Usually marks student work and may not be a permanent staff member of the university.

General and Professional Staff

These non-academic staff provide general administrative, organisational and study support services for students. All Study Abroad and Exchange students will deal with Student Advisers prior to arriving for study plan approvals and for enrolment and course advice when they get here. Other university-wide support is delivered by Academic Skills, Counselling, Finance, Health, Housing, etc.

Assessments and grades

Most courses will have two or three assessments (including exams) submitted across the semester, thus, the weighting for each assessment could be high (e.g. essays worth 60% of the final grade) and the work invested in each assessment reflects this weighting.

At the end of the semester abroad you will receive a University of Melbourne Statement of Results. Work that receives a high mark usually demonstrates both breadth and depth of research, strict adherence to academic conventions and an argument supported by evidence. Below is a summary of the UoM grade table and a suggested translation scale for the conversion to US or Canadian grades. Translation of results in other countries will vary between institutions.

In reality it is quite difficult to score a final grade above the low eighties. Scores in the seventies are considered to be very good, with the majority of students in a subject receiving grades in the sixties. A pass grade is usually taken to be a mark of fifty percent or higher. The amount of feedback given on an assessment item depends on the marker, but may be less than what you are used to.

If recent circumstances in your life have interfered with your academic work, you should let your tutor or lecturer know. In the case of assignments, you may be able to negotiate an extension on your due date. For exams, your grades may be adjusted or you may be able to sit a supplementary exam. To support your case, you may also have to submit an application for special consideration (by providing doctor's certificates, etc.). This often needs to be done within a few days of the exam, or prior to an assessment task being returned to the whole class. Check with your Student Centre regarding the special consideration policy. Extensions are not limitless, so act as soon as possible. Ask your tutor for more information.

If you are not happy with the outcome of an assessment or want a more specific explanation about your comments or grades, your first contact should be with your tutor. If you are still unhappy after this exchange, see your lecturer or subject coordinator. If you require an 'unbiased' opinion about your work, you could book an appointment to see an Academic Skills Adviser and ask their opinion.

| University of Melbourne Grade | Percentage Grade | USA/Canada | Europe |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------------|--------|
| H1 | 80–100 | A+ A | A |
| H2A | 75–79 | A- | |
| H2B | 70–74 | B+ | B |
| H3 | 65–69 | B | C |
| P | 60–64 | B- | |
| | 55–59 | C+ | D |
| | 50–54 | C | E |
| N | 45–49 | C- | FX |
| | 0–44 | F | F |

Source: Melbourne Global Mobility website
<http://www.mobility.unimelb.edu.au/inbound/study/academic-culture.html>, accessed 13 Dec 2011]

Getting help and getting involved

Student Centres

Student Centres provide information about courses and programs, including graduate pathways, advice relating to enrolment/re-enrolment procedures, subject selection, Exchange and Study Abroad, special consideration, single-subject study (CAP), cross-institutional study, timetable questions and more. Website: <http://studentcentre.unimelb.edu.au>

Choosing your subjects

Students should refer to the University's Handbook when selecting subjects. The Handbook gives an overview of all subjects including assessment requirements and any prerequisites. Student Centre staff can assist students with enrolment and subject queries but may need to refer to academic staff for detailed information about subjects.

Website: <https://handbook.unimelb.edu.au>

Working out your class timetable

You will need to consult the University's Handbook to find out when classes are scheduled. At home, you may have been given a timetable or would have been notified by Student Centre staff about any clashes in your timetable. In Australia, it is often up to you to double check your enrolment to see if there are any clashes. If you require any timetable assistance please visit your Student Centre.

Changing your subjects

If you decide that you want to change subjects, you can do it but you need to do it early in the Semester (usually by Week 3). In any case of subject changes, it is important to seek advice from your Student Centre as there may be limitations on what you can do and there may also be forms you need to complete (otherwise, a subject may be recorded as a fail on your record).

First, you should talk to other students in your course – maybe you're not the only one who is confused. Use your tutorials to discuss issues that need clarifying, or ask your tutors or lecturers about it after the class or during their office hours. You can also do extra reading (or use alternative texts) to clear up confusing matters. For more study strategies, talk to an Academic Skills Adviser.

Check the [Academic Skills](#) website for details about how to make an individual appointment with an Academic Skills Adviser.

Website: <http://services.unimelb.edu.au/academicskills>

Other help in adjusting to study and life in a new country

Check the Services for Students section of the UoM web-site for details of all student services provided by the university

Website: <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au>

If you're not sure what service you need, try the [Student Services Finder](#) to focus your search
Website: <http://services.unimelb.edu.au/finder>

Life outside study

[International Student Services](#) organises social functions so you can meet other students from your own country, and get help with things like health insurance, visas, banking, and information about where to shop for food.

Website: <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/international>

[The Student Union](#) (the student society on campus) organises social and sporting events for all students and these events are a great way to meet Australian students.

Website: <http://union.unimelb.edu.au>

[MUOSS](#) (Melbourne University Overseas Student Service) is the official representative body for all overseas students at the University of Melbourne. Website: <http://union.unimelb.edu.au/overseas-students>

You need to be highly organised in your first two weeks so you can visit as many subject lectures as possible. That way you can find out what subjects you really want to study

Anna, Sweden

2. FIRST APPEARANCES: INTERPRETING SOCIAL VALUES IN AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION

In order to help you interact successfully with your teachers and fellow students, let's explore Australian culture. Defining a culture is not easy, especially for a multicultural society like Australia. A long history of immigration, together with global trends in education, mean that Australian universities have staff and students with a large variety of cultural backgrounds.

This reflects the general makeup of Australian society which has a large percentage of people born overseas or recently arrived.

The following observations are designed to help you understand the assumptions that Australians make about society and culture which affect their behaviour.

There are also some tips for working collaboratively with Australian students, as well as for dealing with the homesickness and culture shock that may occur during the early part of your stay.

I think it's neat studying with Australian students. It's mixed cultures.

Charlotte, UK

The value of appearing equal yet independent

Australian society presents many contradictions. Like all societies, there are social distinctions based on income, profession, and the area where someone lives. Nevertheless, there is a widely-held belief that Australians like to think of themselves as all being on the same level. This has a strong influence on many aspects of Australian life. For example, even in competitive sports, most winners will make a point of praising the efforts of the losing team. Specifically, while it is all right to be different, it's not acceptable to act as if you are different – particularly if this means acting as if you are 'better' or 'superior' (albeit unintentionally).

In Australia, someone acting like this is likely to become a victim of the **Tall Poppy Syndrome** (where a person who has achieved excellence or distinction in a particular field is 'cut down' to the same level as everyone else).

Demonstrating personal independence (especially against the odds) is highly valued in Australian society and examples in the media of the Aussie **Battler** (someone working bravely to overcome hardship) are popular. This can also be seen across gender lines, where women and men are equally encouraged to be independent from an early age and it is reflected in the desire of most young Australians to travel and 'see the world'. This levelling idea also exists in higher education, and can clearly be found in the notion of 'independent learning' where students are seen as being just as responsible as their teachers for their learning and subsequent progress in a course.



Attitudes to authority and rules

Notions of independence and egalitarianism are also found in Australian attitudes towards authority and rules. Traditionally, the Australian attitude towards authority is to level out the distinction between boss and workers through humour (especially irony and sarcasm), use of first names or nicknames and **ribbing** (teasing people). When superiors are treated as 'mates', it can appear to visitors that there are no clear boundaries between the leaders and those being led. In later year tutorials at university, particularly in the Humanities, it is common to rotate the leadership of the tutorial, with a different student being allocated a different topic to present each week with minimal supervision.

Another example of the lack of a firm divide between staff and students is the practice of addressing academic staff by their first names. However, be aware that this common usage of first names is not a **blanket rule** (a rule that everyone follows) and you need to consider context and relationship before you use first names with everyone you meet. You may also find that staff are reluctant to emphasise the use of titles (such as Doctor or Professor) even though they do value the degrees these titles represent.

While Australian society has just as many rules as other societies, traditionally they have been

I don't think Australian students are as competitive as we are in the States. People were willing to help me out, answer any questions I had, proof read essays, study together, that sort of thing. It was really nice.

Brigid, USA

relatively low key (as rules are a reminder of authority and go against the ideal of a level society). However, this situation, together with a more laid-back approach to life, appears to be changing – at least in Australian cities. Some critics have observed that Australia is in danger of becoming a **Nanny State** (a place where the government makes all the decisions for people that they previously made for themselves). At university, the absence of rules can still present itself in the lack of overt supervision of your progress in a program of study or your attendance and behaviour at subject lectures. Again, this ties into notions of being an 'independent learner'.

Decision making and argumentation

As levellers, Australians are less interested in outstanding achievements at the expense of the group; they tend to prefer cooperative strategies. Inclusive decision making is another cooperative venture for Australians. A popular authority figure in Australia will often allow their workers to be part of the decision-making process. This is an important point to remember if you are working in a team on a project or assignment. Furthermore, don't be surprised if your lecturers consult you from time to time on which topics to include in the curriculum.

As a student in Australia, it's not usually a problem to inquire in class about related topics you find interesting: most academic staff will be more than pleased to incorporate current issues raised by students. An extension of this is when students are given the choice of writing their own topic for a piece of assessment. See Chapter 5 (Writing) for guidance about how to write your own questions.

The education system in Australia encourages students to speak their mind and to develop skills to argue in a respectful yet very direct manner. This high level of argumentation forms a key component to written assessment at university level. Having an opinion is important, but more important is being able to justify that opinion and support it based on solid research.

Attitudes to work and play

At first glance, the pace of life in Australia may seem slower than many other developed countries and the traditional Australian attitude to work may be different from other more 'workaholic' cultures. However, whereas the pressures of globalisation mean more Australians are now conforming to corporate pressures to work longer hours, they still greatly value their leisure time, particularly at the weekend.

At Uni, most students live off campus (although some accommodation is provided at colleges and halls of residence for interstate and rural students), therefore the campus is much quieter in the evenings and on weekends. Dining halls exist in the residential colleges, but not on the main campus where there are a variety of fast food outlets catering to students. During Semester, libraries are often open until late in the evening, but many other services will be closed.

When applying this more relaxed attitude to uni work, many Australian students will not agonise over changes to a piece of work until they achieve perfection, but rather will trade off further improvements for the value of completing the job and moving on.

This pragmatic attitude is summed up nicely in the all-encompassing and popular phrase **She'll be right, mate!** (everything will be OK)

Knock off time (when work finishes for the day) is strictly 5pm for many workers, and while shopping hours are longer than they used to be, these may be localised to areas which also have restaurants and cafes that are open late (Friday night is the traditional 'late night' shopping night in Melbourne although most stores are closed by 9pm).

The art of making friends

Many outsiders perceive Australians as friendly, easy-going, and easy to talk to. If you learn a little about the favourite local sports (Aussie rules football, cricket, tennis), then it may be even easier to strike up a conversation. If not, try the notoriously changeable Melbourne weather as a conversation starter.

While many Australians are well travelled, unlike other nationalities, many Australians tend not to move away from their city of birth. This means that many people have a close set of 'good mates' they have known since childhood, and fewer casual acquaintances compared to some other cultures. As a result, friendships are viewed as a long-term commitment, and while it may be easy to get to know and socialise with Australians, it may require more effort to develop lasting friendships.

But don't be fooled by this laid back, no worries, attitude to work. Although Aussies may take their tea break seriously and **sickies** (days off work with illness as an excuse), not to mention their public holidays, annual leave (one month per year), and long service leave (three months of paid holiday for every 10 years of service) they will not tolerate a **bludger** (someone who does not contribute to the team). To let down your work mates is more of a crime than letting down the corporate image. For Australians, it is not the amount of work that is valued, but the usefulness of the work that gives it value. This translates into your assessment at uni: it's not the amount of work that you do (hence, there are only a few pieces of assessment items for each subject), but how well your work presents an answer to the question at hand.

A good place to meet Australian students is through the sports clubs and through the social and interest-based societies on campus. Many of these clubs will promote themselves to attract new members in O Week (Orientation Week), the week before the start of Semester. This is a good time to join up as other new students are also looking to make friends and there are often special freebies (free gifts) included in membership. If you miss orientation, check the Student Union website for the complete list of clubs and societies available. Despite having elected representatives in each club, such as president, treasurer, membership secretary, and so on, you will find that most clubs are very informal, preferring to focus on socialising or the sport or activity itself, rather than the red tape (bureaucracy) involved in running the club.

Another way you will get to know Australian students better is to work together. Maybe your subject requires you to work in teams, or you may decide to start or participate in a study group. The following section provides information on how to learn better with your fellow students.

The Australian sense of humour is extremely dry – not only littered with strange idioms that may leave you confused – but also full of irony and sarcasm (for example, a red-head is called **bluey**, a bald man, **curly**, etc.). When your Aussie mates **take the piss out of you** (tease you) the expectation is that you will laugh along and return the **ribbing** in that same laconic style. To take offence and become upset is more likely to be interpreted as **being up yourself** (thinking you are better than others) and considering yourself too good to be part of this 'game'. Of course, if you feel you are being unfairly treated, you must stand up for yourself and say so.

Working together at uni: collaborative learning

Differing learning styles can complement each other. Therefore, collaborating with other students is a great way to combine different approaches in order to benefit from a broader range of skills and a wider range of cultures than just your own.

Many of your Australian fellow students will be struggling with the same new concepts as you, although they will bring with them many of the assumptions and background information that you may be missing. However, as an international student, you may be able to bring a fresh perspective to the problem under discussion. By pooling your resources, you can be of mutual

I think the Australians are pretty laid back. I just feel that people are more relaxed here.

Laura, Italy

benefit to each other. Even for routine tasks such as homework reading for a tute, working with a friend can help you both understand it better.

However, be aware of the difference between collaboration and copying. If you have to submit work, ensure that you complete it individually. You can discuss issues, problems, and solutions together, but the work you submit must be your own.

Studying at university, particularly as a new student can be lonely. Often you will find yourself in second year classes where students have already made friends. Starting a regular informal study group in order to learn collaboratively is an easy way to change this. You will meet friends, get a better insight into the Australian tertiary system and also enjoy a more enriched stay in Australia. So many benefits!

Tips for Successful Study Groups

- Arrange a regular meeting time before or after the lecture or tutorial when it is easier for everyone to get together.
- Select a place that encourages work rather than socialisation.
- Make sure you have a specific task in mind when you meet. For example, questions about the last lecture or tutorial session, a critique of readings, brainstorming and discussing essay questions, practising exam questions, or completing tutorial assignments.
- Use active learning tasks so you are working together on DOING something with the study material, not just re-reading it. For example, summarise a reading to your study group.
- Help each other with both motivation and content then reward your hard work with some extra social activities (e.g. going out for pizza together when the day's tasks are done).

Dealing with homesickness and culture shock

Homesickness is a strange thing; it can strike the most experienced of travellers at the most bizarre and unexpected of times. Researchers into adjustment patterns of students having a 'stop-over' in another culture have suggested that this process follows a curve that rises, falls, and then rises again. That is, while the initial adjustment to another society appears to be progressing well, this is followed by a 'crisis' period when the student feels lonely and unhappy, and a final stage when the student feels better adjusted and more integrated into his or her new society. The lowest point usually occurs anywhere between the fourth month and the twelfth month of a stay, depending on when the euphoria and excitement of being in another culture wears thin (however, for some people it never does!).

For you as a student, homesickness can be extremely disruptive, causing you to waste valuable time that could be spent on studying, sightseeing, or socialising. While there is no 'cure', there are some things you can do to help yourself adjust to being away from your friends and family. Remember, being a little unsure of what you have got yourself into is only natural. Try some of the following strategies to help you:

- Don't be afraid to ask where things are, how people do things here, or who can help you. Many people enjoy discussing cultural differences.
- Take a range of university tours during Orientation Week to find out where things are. Tours also provide a great opportunity to meet other students in a similar position.
- The sooner you make friends, the easier the transition to studying in Australia will be. Open yourself up to friendship.
- Look for similar activities that you enjoyed at home (sports, social or hobby-related).
- The more active you are, the easier you will sleep at night (yes, that's always the worst time for homesickness!). Australia is a great outdoors country, so develop a few new hobbies like rock-climbing, bush-walking, playing Aussie rules footy, or surfing. Melbourne also has amazing cafes, bookshops and cinemas.

I found some Australians rude. In college at home, you're there because you want to be there and you want to learn and you're quiet and you show respect to the professor.

Kimberley, USA

- Keep in contact with home via e-mail, phone, social media and even mail (everyone likes to get postcards!)
- Put up pictures of familiar faces and places in your room.
- Get yourself a 'buddy': someone you can talk to who understands what you are going through.

Also, remember that being an 'outsider' in a new culture does have its advantages as well.

As a newbie (new person), you will become extra observant and start to notice things that you didn't really appreciate when you were at home. Time may also slow down as you leave your normal routine behind and start living differently.

But this isn't how we do it back home ...

'Culture shock' is a phrase we tend to use to cover a variety of feelings of which the most dominant is unfamiliarity and the related stress that results. Culture shock may be caused by many obvious, and not so obvious things, for example, the weather, the language, the different ways of dressing and behaving or even the plumbing!

Like homesickness, culture shock is triggered on a seemingly trivial level. While each individual item is small, their combined effect can be overwhelming. Your own approach to your time in Australia is very important in combating culture shock. People who see the differences as an opportunity to explore and learn new things often cope better than those who view everything as a poor comparison to the way it is 'back home'. However, no matter how open-minded you are, you may reach a stage where you feel disconnected from your own culture. Stay in touch with what's happening at home by reading online newspapers or even buying an magazine from back home.



Succeeding in study in any situation is all about taking control of yourself and balancing your work with play. In Australia, fewer scheduled classes, together with new and exciting things to do and see, can lead students to misjudge the amount of work that needs to be done.

At the same time, all work and no play makes for a very dull international experience. Here we have suggestions to help you find the balance needed to learn, but also to have fun and stay motivated.

So, give the following ideas a **go** (a try) and **you'll be right** (OK)!

Australians seem ready to talk and argue with each other. I don't know if it has to do with the school system, but I think you can tell that it's already ingrained in them.

Andrew, UK

Want to find out more about Australian culture?

Use these websites to get started.

David Stybr

Australian English Glossary from A to Zed
<http://www.uta.fi/FAST/US1/REF/aust-eng.html>

Tourism Australia

About Australia: Australia's culture
<http://www.australia.com/about/culture.aspx>

Understanding Australian culture through its convict past
<http://www.convictcreations.com>

3. GETTING STARTED: BALANCING STUDY WITH LEISURE

Managing your commitments: making a study timetable

To manage all your commitments you need to plan a balanced weekly timetable that works for you. To get the most from your study at UoM, your timetable should allow for all the regular activities you do each week. So, as well as classes, assignment work and study time, your timetable should include activities that you might do in a week; for example, a part time job, sports, hobbies, clubs or travel.

Even if you don't use a timetable, the practice of creating one is a way to raise awareness of your time commitments each week. Your timetable will identify what needs to be done each week and how much available time you have to complete tasks. It also helps you develop a routine, which is essential for successful study.

It will also help evaluate how efficiently you are using your time. It should be tailored to your needs and learning preferences, and may take a little time to adjust to. A useful timetable must also be flexible.

A weekly schedule might look like this:

| | Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| AM | Dandenongs trip with host family | Uni classes Aust Studies. 11-1 | Work on Eco assignment #1 draft | Study 10-11 Gender Studies | Study 9-12.30 Gender Studies | Uni classes Gender Studies 11-1 | Study 9-11 Aust Studies. |
| PM AFT | Dandenongs trip with host family | Work on Eco assign #1 draft | Uni classes Eco. 1-5 | Uni classes Aust Studies. 1-3 | Finalise Eco assignment #1 | Uni classes Eco. 1-2 | Free |
| PM EVE | Free | Study 7-9 Aust Studies. | Study 7-9 Eco | Work on Eco assignment #1 draft | Tennis 7.30 | *Eco assignment #1 due 5pm today | Simon's party! |

- You can colour code sections, such as when classes are on and when assignments are due. This is a good visual reminder about what is happening in your week.
- Include regular times for revision of lecture and tutorial material within 24 hours of first learning the material. This will help embed the material into your long term memory.
- The secret to success in managing the workload is to do small but regular amounts of study in each of your subjects. Irregular or last-minute study concentrates your efforts into high stress periods and produces poor long-term learning gains.
- One hour is about the minimum 'chunk' of study time before you need to take a break. You need to get a good 'run' at study so that you internalise information and achieve study goals.
- Aim to study at least 2 hours outside class each day, and do some study in each subject two to three times a week.

In America, we have much longer contact hours. There's more lecture format and more tutorial contact hours. And I think the professors don't anticipate that you're gonna spend as much time in the library as you would here.

Scott, USA

- Consider your personal preferences for studying. Allocate study into times when you are most productive. e.g. schedule difficult thinking tasks at your strongest time – whether morning, afternoon, or evening – and do less difficult tasks, such as photocopying, when you feel less alert.
- Use active learning strategies to keep your studies interesting; 'do' something with the material you are studying, e.g. summarise it, explain it to someone. Include some collaborative study tasks so you are not locked away alone all day.

Now you've completed your timetable – put it somewhere prominent where you (and others if you are sharing accommodation) can see it as a visual reminder of your weekly commitments.

You also need to think about managing your time over the semester. This means getting organised throughout the early part of semester in order to cope with the busy weeks at the end of semester when everything is due. A semester / year planner can help with this. (Year planners are available at newsagents.)

Australian classes: how much study should I do?

The amount of work required will vary depending on your subjects. In Australia, most subjects will have a major assessment (exam or assignment) towards the end of semester, with one or two other minor assessments during the semester.

Generally, for most of the semester, your study time will consist mostly of reading and reviewing of lecture and tutorial material. As a general rule, approximately two hours study for each hour of classes is the minimum required.

When assignments are due, expect to spend additional time completing them. With fewer contact hours it may feel like there is plenty of time to get the work done, but if you haven't put in the regular study time earlier in the semester, then at the end you may be overwhelmed by study demands.

Consider your study environment

Part of creating good study habits is making sure you have a place to study where you can get a reasonable amount of work done. If you are finding it hard to settle down to study, you might need to think about your study environment.

There's not as much pressure on you to do work, it's more up to you whether you want to do it or not. I suppose at home there's more pressure, more deadlines to meet. There's not so much emphasis on exams either, a lot of it's essay work which leaves a lot up to yourself. So, in that way, it makes you think more, which is probably more of a challenge than at home.

Richard, Ireland

Here are some ideas about study environment.

Some students find it easier to work where other people are also studying; if you find this atmosphere works well for you, then organise to do your study in one of the university libraries.

If you have your own study space at home, make sure it's set up to maximise your study time:
desk, comfortable chair, computer access, place to put books, storage for files etc.



Some people also form study groups and meet in library spaces or other suitable areas on campus: the uni has plenty of these types of spaces!

At home, put a sign on your door when you are studying and let your housemates take messages for you or deal with other interruptions. Switch your mobile phone to silent and disable social networking pages: while you are studying, eliminate other distractions.

Motivation: how to stay enthusiastic all semester

Motivation is a key to successful study and, given the excitement of travelling to another country and choosing subjects that are new and different, your interest levels will probably be higher than most students. The danger, however, is more likely to occur later in the semester when the excitement is wearing off and the workload increases.

Remember; given that you are in a new culture, you do not have to know or even understand everything that you encounter straight away. Give yourself time to digest information.

If motivation declines, procrastination may set in. Many of the issues students encounter with procrastination revolve around managing time and workload, and with deadlines at the end of semester, it's easy to put off study.

The time management ideas suggested here will help you to develop good study habits. The best way to beat procrastination is to practise the Art of **DIN - Do It Now!** The time you spend thinking about doing something could be the time it takes to actually do it. Here are some pointers to help you avoid the procrastination habit and get on with the task at hand.

Start by ...

✓ **Developing a routine:** if you have some mornings open in your university schedule, use those times as study sessions rather than sleeping in. Develop the routine of knowing when you are going to study. Set these times and stick to them.

✓ **Setting realistic and achievable study goals:** Tell yourself you'll work for 1 hour minimum then take a short break – in that time set a target that you can achieve.

✓ **Getting a good 'run' at study:** give yourself time to get things done in meaningful chunks; one hour should be about the minimum before a break. Anything less doesn't give you enough time to 'get into it'.

✓ **Developing the 'To Do' list habit:** Use your timetable, a program on your computer or even Post-it notes to keep daily or weekly 'To do' lists. If you find you're not getting through the tasks - modify the list!

✓ **Getting help from other people:** Collaborative learning can help you get your study habits on track; have a 'Study Buddy'. Tutors, lecturers and Academic Skills Advisers can also help by giving you deadlines to hand in drafts of your work before the due date.

Get it done - have SMART study goals:

Wherever possible, have concrete goals when you are studying.

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| SPECIFIC | Goals or tasks should be expressed in precise, specific details; e.g. '7.30~9pm, read chapters 7-9 of the textbook', rather than 'Read economics tonight'. |
| MEASURABLE | Goals should always be quantifiable and achievable, so that you clearly know when they have been completed, e.g. listen to lecture 2 on Lectopia; read 3 case studies, summarise 2 economics articles. |
| ACHIEVABLE | Set targets you can realistically get done in the time you have. It is more reasonable to say 'read 10 pages' rather than 'review pages 1-100 tonight'. |
| RELEVANT | Make sure you are reviewing important, key areas, especially during revision. Subject Guides will direct you to the key areas. |
| TIMED | Know when a task must be completed by. You then need to prioritise tasks; sequence them in order of importance – this is determined by 3 things: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - due date; - size of assignment (i.e. word count); and - % value towards your subject grade. |

And remember: reward yourself!

Take opportunities to reward yourself when you have completed an assignment or difficult task. Mark these achievements off in your diary or on a wall planner as an incentive to study.

Remember, to allow yourself the 'luxury' of some time for sightseeing, you will need to compensate by studying for more hours earlier in the week.

Other reward ideas:

- ✓ Eat take-away meals on more intensive study days.
- ✓ Treat yourself to a relaxing spa or massage.
- ✓ Become a sports supporter and view a local game (Aussie Rules!).
- ✓ See a film, play or visit a museum or art gallery with a friend (Ian Potter at the University is good).
- ✓ Dance the night away with your friends.
- ✓ See Melbourne!
- ✓ And, note, any chocolate eaten during study time is calorie free (!).

Balance the hard work with some fun!

It was really hard to get motivated to study, because nobody's studying until the very end, cos there aren't tests to keep you on the ball.

Beth, USA



4. TIPS TO MAXIMISE YOUR STUDY SUCCESS

This chapter will focus on basic study techniques that will enhance the quality of your learning experiences in Australia. As a high-achieving student, many of the tips included will be familiar to you, however, their application in Australia and the different focus or importance they have here could be new.

Perhaps the most significant feature of your study in Australia is the expectation that you will be an **independent learner**.

As an independent learner you will be expected to plan, organise and cope with ongoing course demands in a more self-directed way than you may have previously experienced. You will need to develop skills in prioritising tasks; managing your reading load; taking efficient notes from lectures, tutorials and readings; and using this information effectively to complete assignments and take exams without, perhaps, the level of support you are used to.

This chapter will look at key elements of the four study skills of **Reading**, **Listening**, **Speaking** and **Writing** in terms of being an independent learner.

You don't meet as often for classes here so I have a lot of free time. And you just go to lectures, listen and leave – there's not as much personal one on one contact, which you get in a small college like mine at home.

Courtney, USA

Reading

Reading is a vital component of successful tertiary study. This is particularly true in Australia where courses often have extensive reading lists. While you are not directly graded on your reading, assignments and exams are usually based on research, so it is important to have strategies around reading.

The readings you are given as part of class are used to prepare for lectures and tutorial discussions, as well as helping you research for assignments and to review for exams. To do all of this efficiently, you will need to use a variety of reading strategies.

Each week, you will have a list of readings for each of your subjects. Sometimes you will be provided with the material to read in a course reader or through the LMS; at other times, you will be given the details of the articles/books and will have to find them yourself in the library or online.

The reading load will consist of a variety of text types including journal articles, chapters of textbooks or excerpts from books and, at times, it may feel overwhelming. In order to cope with the reading load you will need to:

- ✓ **Prioritise readings:** determine what is essential; what you need to know. You will not always have time to read everything from start to finish, so read the most important articles first. A way to prioritise is to determine what is **recommended** (what the lecturer or tutor recommends you to look at to help you to understand a topic) versus what is **compulsory** (what you have been told read in order to prepare for a tutorial discussion).
- ✓ **Be selective:** some reading tasks may be less essential or relevant than others; if you can determine that a particular reading is not relevant to the particular task you are doing, then leave it.
- ✓ **Compare readings:** read widely enough to gain an insight into different approaches and perspectives.

✓ **Critically engage with readings:** many courses require you to evaluate what you are reading; read in enough depth to understand the issues each author raises and record your reactions to it.

Efficient reading strategies

In order to be able to read efficiently, you need to consider how you read. Remember to use the following strategies.

1. Previewing your reading: surface reading and using text features

The purpose of previewing is to familiarise yourself with the text — to help you decide whether to read in more detail or move on to the next text.

You can do this with **surface reading** techniques: **skimming** and **scanning**.

- **Skimming:** quick reading to get the gist or main idea of the text. For example, looking at an article to determine if the topic is relevant to you.

- **Scanning:** quick reading to locate specific information, e.g. key words, facts, statistics. For example, looking at a Contents page in a book to determine if it has a section relevant to your study.

Use skimming and scanning techniques to help determine whether a text will be useful for you.

Look at features of text to help you, such as:

- **Abstracts (summaries):** Read the abstract or the introductory paragraph. In academic writing, the usual practice is to put the main idea down first, and then to set out the supporting evidence. By reading the summary or abstract, you can identify the main idea or **thesis** of the writing.
- **Table of contents:** check this for details of sections and sub-sections, and what the book covers.
- **In-text features:** look at headings and sub-headings, visuals such as graphs and tables, and point-form lists.
- **Overall text:** Don't read every word. Reading 'topic sentences' (usually the first and main sentence of the paragraph) can give you a good idea of the whole paragraph.

Once you have done this initial assessment, you can move from surface reading to **deep** reading of text.

2. Directed reading

A clear sense of purpose about your reading (*why* you are reading) will help you preview the material for its suitability as well as helping note-taking.

For every reading task, have a goal in mind – try not to read just for the sake of reading. Prior to reading, be clear about what you are looking to do. For example, you might read to:

- get an overview
- develop a detailed understanding
- verify a fact or find something specific
- prepare for a tutorial or to give a seminar
- assess whether the text can be used for an assignment.

If you are reading as part of research for an assignment, a clear understanding of the assignment task will certainly help you direct your efforts.

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Content | Key concepts; ideas; definitions; key words |
| Organisation | Sections of text; how it is presented |
| Connections | Links to other texts, authors, ideas and theories |
| Questions | Things you question or don't understand |
| Response / reflection | Your reaction to the text; your opinion |

When you are reading also consider *what* you are reading for:

3. Active reading: Using information from your readings

Once you have determined that a text is useful for you to read; you need to ensure that you not only read effectively, but that you do not need to re-read or 'double-handle' material. Taking good clear notes will help you to make best use of your reading.

Making detailed notes helps you:

- To **record the source of the information** so that you can find it again: author's name(s), title, page numbers, URL are minimum requirements.
- **Organise your thinking about the subject.** The act of reading will help you develop a framework of thinking around the topic and how it might fit into an assignment question.
- **Put information into your own words.** This requires you to understand the information. You need to acknowledge the author if you are quoting or paraphrasing but the act of working with the original text will help you understand it.

- To **create a basis for your written work**. It is the first step to writing your essay; transforming your reading into an essay draft consisting of your notes will form the basis of your assignment.

A key feature of effective academic writing is using **your voice**: a good way to do this is to rewrite in your own words (see **Writing in Chapter 5**).

An active reader always does something with the text; they **don't just read**. Active reading helps to embed the information in your long-term memory.

Develop your own ideas when you take notes and write, rather than copy-pasting other people's words.

Note-taking vs highlighting as an active learning tool

Some students prefer to underline or highlight the important points rather than take notes, and this is OK, **but** highlighting does not necessarily indicate understanding of the material.

If you are reading in order to write an assignment, **taking notes in your own words** is the first step towards writing a draft. When you begin to write, these notes are far more useful than pages of highlighted text of someone else's words. It's also an advantage that when you sit down to actually write the assignment, having detailed notes is a great way to prevent writer's block as you have already generated something.

If you still prefer to highlight, be selective, and write your own comments and questions in the margin of the text.

As you won't have enough time to re-read the books and articles set for each subject, reading for recall is an important skill to develop. To help yourself remember what you have read, spend as much time as you can being active with your information, rather than just reading and re-reading it.

Active reading strategies

- Transform the words, ideas, and major points, turning them from text into a table, a flow chart, a picture, etc.
- Become familiar with the 'big picture'; read from a wide range of sources and read often. This familiarity will help your understanding. Look for similarities and links across texts.
- Become comfortable with the ideas of your subject, the way your subjects are presented and with the vocabulary of the specific discipline.
- Try explaining it to others; the more easily you can explain the ideas to someone else, the more you will understand and remember them yourself.



Listening and note-taking

A major component of university life in Australia involves listening; during lectures and tutorials. In order to make the most of these classes it's necessary to take notes.

Taking notes is beneficial as:

- it **focuses** you on what is being said – it helps you concentrate
- it **forms a record** and so helps with later study
- you are putting the **ideas** into **your words**
- you can use **notes for discussion** with other students
- you can use them to **help write assignments**

Lecture notes help you organise and understand subject concepts and content, but they need to be supplemented with information from other sources. Use your lecture notes as a basis for linking together notes from additional reading and from tutorial discussions. This will help you to develop an organised and complete set of information to use for revision before exams.

Often a complete set of lecture information is provided at the start of the course and on the LMS, and copies of PowerPoint slides are often provided at lectures – use these to help you take notes. Some academics also choose to upload their lectures to **Lectopia*** so that you can listen to them as often as you need to.

(*Lectopia recordings are accessed through the subject LMS sites. It is also known as **Lecture Capture**.)

What is the right note-taking method for me?

People take notes in a variety of ways. One method might be to make a 'mind map' where the main idea is written in the centre of the page and the related points branch away from it. Another method is to organise notes hierarchically with headings, sub-headings and bullet points. It doesn't matter what shape your notes take as long as **they make sense to you** when you use them for your revision.

We all learn differently so keep in mind your own learning preferences. Experiment with different note-taking techniques, but settle as quickly as possible on a style that suits you.

- **Visual learners** may use diagrams and charts, rather than overly textual notes.
- **Holistic learners** may rework their notes at the end of the class, once they can see the whole picture.
- **Linear learners** may bullet or number the ideas as they listen.
- **Factual learners** might add in examples of the points made.

Focus your ideas - write the topic and date at the top of the page, and during the introduction, note the main points of the lecture.

Listen for 'signposts' that the lecturer might use

– these are expressions or language signals that point to key information. For example:

- I would like to point out that ...
- The major issue here is ...

I've been in small and large classes before, but I haven't had the experience where you have both for the one subject and you have two different teachers working with you for that one class - so that was something new.

Christopher, Germany

Speaking

There are two main academic contexts in which you may be called upon to speak when at university: **tutorials** (small-group interactive classes) and **seminar presentations** (where you may be called upon to present in a small group situation).

In tutorials, your participation, mental skills, communication skills, ability to think on the spot and carry through a logical argument are all required. While tutorial participation may account for only a small percentage of your final grade (or none at all), the information you gain in tutorials is vital in preparing for assignments and exams. While you may feel comfortable about public speaking and are not afraid to express your thoughts, the depth and the analytical nature of the tutorial discussion may be new to you and require a little time to get used to.

Preparing for your tutorials

You need to be prepared to participate actively in your tutorials. At the start of the semester, you should be issued with an outline of weekly tutorial topics and you may be required to read through a reading pack, i.e. a set of photocopied course readings. To participate actively in tutorial discussion, you should be familiar with the ideas presented in the articles related to each topic **before** the tutorial.

Prioritise your reading and decide try to determine the most important aspect of each article. Read a range of material available on the tutorial topic and consider aspects such as similarities of approach between authors; differences in interpretations; key questions raised; and issues that are unsolved or are unclear.

Prepare for discussion in your tutes by developing a series of questions about the material. The more you prepare by actively engaging with the topic, the more productive and valuable the discussion will be in your tutorial.

I found the tutorials hardest to adjust to. I just don't think that I could ever really get into the swing of discussing things to the extent that it was expected in the tutorial

Matthew, USA

Speaking in tutorials

Tutorials feature rigorous academic discussion, so don't be afraid to voice a point of view. However, don't be too dogmatic and overly argumentative, or you risk alienating yourself from the rest of the class. Be prepared to discuss the issues and listen to other points of view. If you participate actively and respectfully, you will learn from discussion and feel part of the group.

Often the focus of the tutorial is to discuss a question or an issue from various perspectives. While there may not be a 'right' answer, a range of views that may come from informed sources, such as the literature, will be discussed. Rather than a superficial overview of the topic, the issue may be debated in depth.

Prepare for your lecture – this will help you to better organise and record the information presented in the lecture itself. Reading texts and suggested references, or at least being familiar with the subject of the lecture before you arrive, are useful forms of preparation.

Annotate the printed notes as you follow the lecture - will help you stay actively involved with the concepts and will help you to identify important issues. The presented lecture may differ from your printed notes so add points or examples to elaborate, or draw connecting lines on your printed notes to help clarify the information.

No matter what style you choose, good lecture notes are usually brief, and designed to embed the ideas in your memory. If you are the type of student that tries to write down every word that is said, give this habit the flick (get rid of it). Instead, make notes to help capture the major points and to help you remember them later.

Your '**tute**' (tutorial) classes form the basis of your group learning and provide academic and social interactions with other students.

Seminar Presentations

You may be called upon to lead a seminar or present in some sort of student conference situation.

If presenting in a seminar situation, the presentations are usually followed by a class discussion of the issues raised by the speakers. The average tute or conference presentation is usually 20 minutes. You may be given assistance with readings to prepare for your talk, or you may have to research it yourself.

Many students are reluctant to take topics that occur early in semester as they like to wait and see how their classmates perform. However, later in semester you'll be working **flat out** (to full capacity) and students who present first may be given a little more marking leniency than those who wait, so if there's an interesting topic early in the semester, get in and grab it first!

The key to success in any sort of oral presentation is preparation and practice. Here are some tips to help you prepare and present confidently.

- If you have a choice of topic, choose one that interests you and one that you can easily find information on.
- Approach your talk in the same way you would tackle an essay topic. You need to brainstorm ideas, plan and organise a logically sequenced argument.
- Speak to the audience rather than read your presentation. Use **brief** notes to remind yourself of what to say, or more detailed notes if you are nervous, but **don't read it**.
- The structure needs to include clear **introduction** and **conclusion** sections, as well as the body of information. Remember that effective presenters:
 - tell the audience what they are about to say (intro),
 - say it (body), and finally,
 - tell the audience what they have just said (conclusion).
- Develop your ideas clearly and in a logical sequence. Use signal language to show what you are doing in parts of the talk. For example:
 - Moving to the next point, ...* (show transition)
 - Another thing to consider is, ...* (signal an additional point)
 - but,* (signal contrast)
 - finally* (signal you are about to finish)

Tips on contributing successfully to tutorials

1. **Analyse how communication happens in the tutorial.** Be aware of how students address the tutor and each other, their levels of formality and sincerity in discussions and if and how neutrality and objectivity are maintained.
2. **Practise using the communication styles you observe.** This does not mean trying to be Australian; rather, you may need to adapt your communication to a style that Australians accept more readily.
3. **Further observation will help you to communicate effectively within the tutorial.** Starting in small ways (e.g. asking questions) is usually easiest. From here you can try answering questions, contributing to arguments and counter-arguments, and initiating discussions. In no time, you'll be **chewing the fat** (having a discussion).
4. **Don't wait too long to move through these stages.** Confidence improves through participation. Ideally, you will be contributing in some small way from the first tutorial (even if it's introducing yourself to the class), and certainly you should be contributing as much as other students by mid-semester.
5. **Just do it.** Speaking is a skill where, in order to improve, you just have to **have a go** (try it).

- Use presentation software, such as PowerPoint, to guide your presentation and provide information for your audience to look at, as well as listening to you. (Remember though, use presentation software sparingly; *it* supports *you*, not the other way around.)
- Practise your presentation for timing, sequencing and content.
- Maintain a good posture, and avoid annoying mannerisms and fidgeting (especially notice what you do with your hands).
- Maintain eye contact with your audience.
- Make sure you can be heard at the back of the room.
- Modulate your voice so that there is variation in your tone.
- Above all, relax and breathe!

Writing

It is common for subject assessments at Melbourne (especially in the Humanities disciplines) to consist of two or three written assignments. You already have experience writing assignments, doing research, and in being a high-achieving student. However, as there may be fewer assessable assignments to be done, you may have limited chances to gain feedback and learn from experience. Being aware of the styles and organisation of written work in Australia will help you.

This chapter will give you an understanding of what is expected of you and give you some ideas of the steps in the process of writing a Humanities-style essay.

Which assignment question should I choose?

It is common practice in Australia to give students several assignment questions to choose from. Sometimes, making this choice is a difficult task.

Some things to think about when choosing a topic:

- **Choose a topic that is of some interest to you:** it's easier to write and engage with a topic when you have interest in it.
- **Choose a topic for which there is enough research information available:** you need to be able to find information on the topic. It may be interesting, but if you can't find information about it, then it is not a good choice.
- **“It's my third selection!” – Choose a topic and stay with it:** Take extra time selecting a topic you can write about and stick with it. Chopping and changing topics tends to waste a lot of time and effort.
- **Don't wait too long to choose:** Yes, take extra time to make a good choice, but do make a choice – don't muck around (waste time). You need to get started plenty of time before the submission date.

Analysing the assignment question

The Australian approach to answering an essay-style assignment question, especially in many of the Humanities disciplines, involves taking a position or an opinion on an issue. The essay topic is often referred to as a **'question'** (even though it may not be one grammatically) for which you should provide an **'answer'**.

It would have helped a lot if I'd known what the lecturers and tutors really expected – it would have been a lot more comforting when writing the paper. But it's hard when you only turn in two or three papers, so you don't know until you get the first one back what they really want.

Anna, Spain

In the initial stages, you will be searching for information relevant to the topic that will help you to decide what the answer could be from your perspective. To focus your research, you will need to begin by analysing the essay question.

1. Identify the theme of the question

The theme/s will help you put your question in a context. It will also give you a starting place in your search for resources.

In the question; *“Discuss reasons as to why there has been a minimal increase in the numbers of males taking up primary teaching in the past 25 years”*; the themes are *males* and *primary teaching*.

2. Establish the specific focus of the question

Within the theme of your essay question a specific area should be addressed. It is usual to have a question that has some conflicting opinions to discuss. Do you agree or disagree? You might even take a modified position where you agree to a point, but have some concerns that you think should be addressed.

The specific focus of the question above relates to the success of initiatives around increasing the number of males who choose to become primary teachers (as opposed to females or males who make other teaching or career choices). You would be expected to analyse some of these and comment on their success.

3. Look for direction words in the question

Direction words tell you how to manage the content. For example:

- *Discuss*: look at the issue from different sides; present arguments for and against
- *Describe*: expository writing; talk about something
- *Outline*: give a relatively brief account of something
- *Critically analyse*: engage critically with an issue; evaluate it and provide a clear position of the value of the arguments involved
- *Compare and contrast*: look for and examine similarities and differences

You will need to draw on a wide range of resources to describe the issues and analyse this research to reach your own conclusions. Once you have identified the issue within your question and what you are expected to do with it, then it becomes easier to generate brainstorm ideas to direct your research.

4. Brainstorm ideas related to the question; consider a possible structure

Before you begin to research your assignment question, it helps to generate as many questions as possible to direct your efforts. A good starting place is to apply the questions *what*, *where*, *who*, *why* and *how* to the topic. Questions related to application and theoretical basis, aims, functions, roles, meanings, etc. will also direct your research.

Prior to starting in-depth research, do some *preliminary* reading, such as the relevant chapter in your textbook, or the tutorial readings. This will provide an understanding of the issues involved and answer some of the more basic questions. It will also provide you with some search terms you could use, and may also assist with locating further readings – look at bibliographies provided in these readings.

Your brainstorming of the topic will not stop at this stage. While you are researching, you can go back and amend or add to your brainstormed ideas. Once you have an idea of what you are looking at, consider organising the response into sections of what you want to discuss first, second and so on: this provides the basis for an essay plan.

5. Research

You may already have an idea of what position or perspective you will take with the question; keep this in mind as you are conducting your research. Classify the material you read in relation to this position; e.g. authors who support your point of view and those who provide alternative perspectives.

Be an **active reader** during research; *do something* with the text as you read. A good idea is to take notes as you read; this helps embed the information and saves you time going back and finding or reviewing information you have already read.

As you read, transfer the ideas directly into your essay plan in bullet point form: you can flesh these ideas out later. Also, make sure you take note of author's names, titles, page numbers and URLs in order to go back and get full reference details later if you need them.

At home the assignments came very quickly, so you didn't have a choice – you had to do them straight away. Whereas here you feel you have the option to wait. But really you don't! You have to start straight away to make them good enough for how much they're worth.

Jessica, USA

Research resources

There are many research resources available, a lot of them electronic. Take a library tour early in semester to learn how to access information through the Internet.

Three such valuable resources available to you through UoM are:

- The **Learning Management System (LMS)**: course-specific websites for you listing all relevant course information you need, including assessment details and links to resources at www.lms.unimelb.edu.au

- **LibGuides**: an excellent resource bank organised by discipline and subject, also hyperlinked on the front page of the UoM library website
- **Discovery**: a search engine found on the front page of the University library website at www.library.unimelb.edu.au

The image shows a screenshot of the University of Melbourne Library website. Several key features are highlighted with callouts:

- Discovery Search**: A search bar at the top right of the main content area, with a callout pointing to it from the text above.
- LibGuides**: A link in the bottom right section of the page, with a callout pointing to it from the text above.
- Discovery Search (Detailed View)**: A callout at the bottom left shows a detailed view of the search bar, including a search input field, a search button, and a list of search options: Catalogue, Digital Collections, A-Z Journals, Using Discovery, and A-Z Databases.
- Library Chat**: A callout pointing to a message that says "Library Chat is currently unavailable. Click for other ways to contact the Library."
- Services**: A callout pointing to a list of services including "Your Account", "Catalogue", "Creating Marks", "Web & Workflows", "Courses", "Full Entry and Request forms", "Library Feedback via Twitter", and "Contact us".
- Alumni services**: A callout pointing to a section titled "Alumni services" which includes "Software and tools (including EndNote)" and "Digital".
- Past Exams and Readings online**: A callout pointing to a section titled "Past Exams and Readings online".

Use these resources – they are invaluable for research and for managing your workload.

Creating your own assignment question

Sometimes you are asked to develop your own assignment question grounded in the topics you have covered. This can be hard if you haven't done this before. The following steps (with example notes) may make this easier.

| | |
|---|--|
| 1. Choose a theme. Use tutorial/lecture topics and key readings as guides. | E.g. <i>Health and work</i> |
| 2. Choose a topic focus related to the theme. Narrow the theme down to a more specific focus. | The health of people in the workforce |
| 3. Choose an issue to analyse. Brainstorm a list of questions or ideas about your chosen topic; be creative in thinking. | Why do employees visit doctors more often than they have in the past? Does this affect productivity? Are we 'sicker' than we have been in the past? When? Why? Is there evidence for this? |
| 4. Develop a question. It should be clear and concise and encompass what you plan to do. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use the common essay direction words, such as 'discuss', 'analyse', 'comment on', etc.• Make the focus of your question a "why" question, rather than a "what" question. 'What' focuses on giving the facts, whereas 'why' focuses more on in depth engagement. | Why do employees take more sick leave now than they did in the immediate post-war period? Discuss with regard to the Australian workforce. |
| 5. Refine the question. Before finalising your question, do a search of the literature: use Discovery and LibGuides. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sometimes, too narrow a focus will result in a lack of resources to support the arguments you wish to discuss.• You might also like to discuss your question with your tutor or a classmate for further feedback. | Discuss the claim that "the workforce is sicker than it used to be" with regard to the Australian workforce of the 1950s and that of today. |

Australian academic writing style

The type of academic writing you do is primarily linked to the **genre**: the text type. Examples of genre include; essays, lab reports, business reports, reflective writing, annotated bibliographies or lesson plans.

Different genres have different requirements in how they are presented and what they contain, but there are some principles which apply to many types of academic writing.

Formal tone / objectivity

The tone of academic essays in Australia draws on a formal, objective writing style more than it does on a subjective / personal writing style. Consequently, the principles that traditionally apply to scientific writing—clarity, brevity, accuracy, and objectivity—also provide good guidelines for broader academic writing. The need for a **thesis** (central idea or proposition) and supporting evidence further reinforces these principles.

Formal tone means that use of informal language (unless part of a direct quote), is not appropriate. This includes language such as spoken forms (e.g. *wanna*, *gonna*); contractions (e.g. *isn't*, *don't*); or emotive words (e.g. *amazing*, *great*, *best*). It also includes avoiding the use of exclamation marks (!), to make a point as it presents as being overly emotive or exuberant (x *Isn't it amazing?!*)

Formal writing is also objective, which means that, in Humanities writing especially, the first person 'I' is generally not used**. So, for example, writing "*This essay will examine ...*" is preferred to "*In this essay, I will examine ...*"

The reason for this is that the writing presents as more authoritative in tone as it is the product of what many authors and researchers believe (use of sources), not just you.

(**There are some exceptions to this, such as reflective writing, where you must take a first person position as you are personally reflecting on experience.)

Clear and concise writing

Clarity and conciseness is important in academic writing. You need to be able to make your points clearly and be able to get to the point. Australian academics do not appreciate 'waffling' (using unnecessary words to 'pad out' or extend the word count).

Conciseness and clarity are affected by the language you use, but are also connected to sentence length. Any piece of writing will have a combination of short and long sentences, but keep in mind that the longer a sentence is, the harder it becomes to follow the idea. As a guide, average sentence length in most Word documents is around 1.5 to 2.5 lines long (15 to 25 words). Look carefully at sentences longer than four lines of a Word document (or 40+ words) to see if they can be shortened or broken up.

The level of conciseness expected is bound to an assignment's word limit.

Word limits

One of the features of effective academic writing is the ability to make a point within the word limit allocated.

The word limit is a guide to the breadth and depth of engagement required; the greater the word limit, the greater the depth expected.

Often there is a +/-10% range in terms of what is acceptable to submit (i.e. a 2000 word essay can be between 1800-2200 words long). Pay attention to this; academics will give you some leeway, but if you are well over the limit, most academics will penalise your marks.

A good approach is to allocate a (flexible) word limit guide to sections of your assignment when you create your writing plan. For example, if you have a 2000 word assignment, which you have split into three roughly equivalent major sections, you might decide that each of these will have around 450-550 words, while the Introduction and Conclusion may have around 200-250 each. Try to stick to these word limits while writing.

Cohesive writing

Clear academic writing is also cohesive: the argument 'flows' and 'sticks together'. The language you use should tell the reader how a topic connects to the previous and subsequent parts of the writing, which in turn, aids cohesion and flow by creating links between parts of text. For example, in the first sentence of this paragraph, which identifies *cohesive* as the focus, the word also lets the reader know that cohesiveness is another element of clear writing and, thus, links to the point made in the previous parts of this section.

The following words are some examples of the type of language you can use in your writing to signal functions. This is a sample list only and is not definitive.

| FUNCTION | EXAMPLES OF WORDS |
|---------------------|--|
| <i>addition</i> | and, also, similarly, in addition, furthermore |
| <i>opposition</i> | however, alternatively, on the other hand |
| <i>conclusion</i> | therefore, as a result, consequently, thus |
| <i>confirmation</i> | in fact, indeed |
| <i>sequence</i> | subsequently, first, then, next |
| <i>emphasis</i> | most importantly, in particular, specifically |

Writing which requires you to take a position or make an argument will also often have a thesis statement: a sentence in the introduction which clearly signposts the intention, perspective and scope of the writing.

For example, for the essay topic “Discuss reasons as to why there has been a minimal increase in the numbers of males taking up primary teaching in the past 25 years”; a thesis statement might read:

“This essay will examine three key reasons as to why the number of males taking up primary teaching has not increased significantly in the past 25 years and will consider these causes specifically in relation to the Australian educational context.”

In the introduction of this one essay I had for History class, it was a 3000 word essay, and I got to the end of my introduction and it was 1000 words long! So I thought I may have to redo this topic here. I ended up crossing out three quarters of what I’d planned to do and just focusing on one quarter of the original material, cos it was just gonna wind up being too much.

Kevin, Canada

Tips for when you have written too many words

Look at the assignment criteria:

Match your assignment to the criteria given to you by your lecturer / tutor. Have you done what was asked or have you gone beyond it? Have you remained within the scope of the assignment?

Edit for relevance:

Identify the main sections. Do the topics flow directly from one point to the next? Can you skip some extra material without sacrificing the logical flow of the argument? Is some material irrelevant or not necessary? If so, take it out – be very strict about this.

Remove any repetition:

Do you cover areas in different parts of the writing similarly enough so that they might be combined? One part might be able to go with another to make it a bit shorter, or left out altogether.

Look for theory overload:

Don’t waste too much of the word count explaining theories that are well known for someone at your level of education. Introduce the theory briefly, then move onto why it is relevant for your topic (i.e. the analysis).

Look for detail overload:

Avoid overloading on excessive detail. An area students tend to do this is with giving examples; do you need to give five examples where two might be enough?

Writing with support: using sources accurately - referencing

Your writing will be based on your research of others' ideas in literature and how you have interpreted this information (your voice). Referencing indicates to the reader where you have used literature in your assignment, so if a reference is not present, it indicates that the work is your own.

Each time you present another author's idea, you **must** provide a reference; to neglect this is **plagiarism**: this is taken very seriously in the Australian academic context.

There are two ways you can acknowledge others' work: by using your own words, i.e. **paraphrasing** (or **indirect quoting**); or by using the author's exact words, i.e. **direct quoting** the author. In both instances a citation is needed.

Once you are clear on *what* needs to be cited, it is simply a matter of learning the appropriate conventions regarding *how* to do it. In Australia, there are two main forms of citation used:

- **In-text:** such as APA, MLA or Harvard; the reference appears in the body of the text with the author's family name, year of publication, and (for direct quotes) page number. E.g. (Perez, 1999, p24).
- **Post-text:** such as Chicago, Vancouver or Cambridge/Oxford; the reference is numbered in-text and the details appear outside the body of the text as a numbered footnote at the bottom of the page (or alternatively by endnotes at the end of the essay)¹.

Different departments and disciplines will have a preferred style of referencing; you will usually be given a study guide outlining the preferred style of your department.

¹ A. Perez, *Study Abroad Students: the hidden international student*, Fictitious Press Inc., Melbourne, 1999, p. 24.

The essays are really short compared to what I've done in the States. And the idea of a word limit – I've never had a professor tell me you can't write more than this. It's always a minimum that you have to do and if you go beyond that, they're thrilled that you've done more work ...

Brian, USA

Online referencing information - University guides to citation styles:

University of Melbourne: www.library.unimelb.edu.au/cite

Murdoch University: <http://libguides.murdoch.edu.au/index.php>

University of Southern Queensland: www.usq.edu.au/library/help/referencing

Monash University: <http://www.lib.monash.edu.au/tutorials/>

University of Wollongong: <http://uow.libguides.com>

5. STUDYING FOR EXAMS

Exams are a common form of assessment and you will likely have had experience taking them. However, you may have fewer (usually one major exam) but longer exams here (usually two or three hours long). They are held at the end of the semester (US. 'finals'), rather than smaller tests held throughout the semester. This means that a large percentage of your final grade may be determined by one exam; so, you need to get it right!

As exams most often occur at the end of the subject, they can draw on all the material you have studied. While you will be tested on your ability to recall information, most exams will also require you to demonstrate your understanding of the key themes and theories of the subject, and your ability to apply what you have learned over the semester. These are things you can memorise, but also skills you need to practice.

Types of exams

Exams at UoM vary in length and type. They can be up to 3 hours in length, and of various types:

- **Closed book** - 'typical' exam situation where you are only allowed to take in writing materials
- **Open book** - where you are allowed to take in approved texts for reference
- **Take home** - where you take the paper and submit your answer at a specific time, similar to the way you do an assignment.

The type of exams you have will depend on your course (**Note:** some subjects have no exams and are based solely on assignments or practical work).



Exam preparation essentials

Like most things, the key to exam success is preparation. The following are some quick tips for preparing well for exams:

- **Make yourself a SWOT Vac timetable:** create a timetable highlighting all of your exams. This will help focus your study time in the weeks leading to the exams. Allocate study time to each exam and include any other essential commitments and time for breaks.
- **Revision:** SWOT Vac is much more effective if it really is about revision; i.e. going back over material you have studied before, not learning new material that you should have already learned. The more organised your study system is during semester, then the easier it is to revise during SWOT Vac.
- **Focus your revision:** direct your exam study sessions towards important areas by revising the course or learning objectives, usually listed on the subject LMS site or Subject Guide. Course / Learning objectives are the best indication of what the examiners will be assessing.
- **Use the materials you have:** a good place to start revising is your key readings and textbook (if the subject uses one). Revise chapter questions in textbooks or discussion questions from your tutorials, as these may reflect exam questions.
- **Use active study strategies:** when revising, don't just re-read the material, instead, practise *doing something* with the information. For example; re-summarise your notes; explain difficult concepts to a study partner; or practise the *types* of questions or scenarios the exam might present. If the exam involves writing three long essays in three hours, then you need to revise the material by writing hour-long essays – i.e. time yourself. If the exam involves solving problems, then the more problems you solve for practice, the easier it will be to solve the problems in the exam.
- **Use past papers:** To provide you with some authentic exam practice, use past papers available to you on the University Library site. Go to <http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/exams/> for these. Exams are listed by discipline and subject (note that not all subjects have exams listed here).

In America, we don't have SWOT Vac – you usually take your finals in about five days, and then you're done. They delay your pain here for a long time, doing finals over three weeks!

Andrea, USA

- **Understand the format of the exams:** don't miss the last classes of semester; these usually include an exam review session with vital information about the exam format. Find out as much as you can about the exam itself, including:
 - The **type of questions** to be used (e.g. multiple choice, short answer, essay, etc.) will determine the study strategies you will employ. For example, if you have an exam consisting of essays and short answer questions, then that is what you need to practise.
 - Whether there is a **choice in questions**. If you have a choice in the questions you answer, then you may be able to focus your revision in the areas you feel most confident choosing.
 - The **number of questions** you have to answer. This will determine how much time you can spend on each question.
 - The **weighting of marks for each question**. The number of marks allocated to a question also determines how much time you should spend on it in the exam; the greater the number of marks, the more time you should spend on it.

SWOT Vac – what is it?

After the semester of scheduled classes, there is SWOT Vac; a period of up to a week's 'vacation' during which you SWOT (Study Without Teaching) for exams. Exams are then scheduled for the following three or so weeks.

Exam timetables are usually not published until the middle of semester, so it is a good idea to hold off on planning any semester-end holidays until the exam dates are finalised.

Question preparation

Preparing for multiple choice question (MCQ) exams

A very common form of exam question type. With MCQs people often feel comforted by the knowledge that at least 'the answer is there'. However, study for an MCQ exam should be as rigorous as for any other exam; don't let the presence of answers limit your revision efforts. One good strategy in dealing with MCQs is to cover the possible answers (options) and work out a likely solution before looking at the options. Another good MCQ strategy is to narrow the options down by firstly eliminating clearly incorrect answers.

Time is another factor to consider with MCQ exams. Most MCQ exams are set up for you to answer the questions at a fairly quick rate, so you'll need to work through the questions methodically and at a good pace. If you are unsure of an answer, take your best guess (unless wrong answers are penalised), highlight the question and come back to it if you have enough time. DON'T leave an MCQ question unanswered; you may not have time to return to it and will definitely miss out on the available marks if you don't provide an answer.

Back home you get 20% assignment, 20% mid-term and only a few percent for the final – the final doesn't weigh that much so I'm a little worried about my final right now – it's 75%, so I'm really stressing out about that.

Susana, Canada

Preparing for problem solving exams

Simply reading through sample problems is a passive way to learn and does not test whether you can reach a solution on your own. Try to work through the problems that have been set throughout the semester, under exam conditions.

Problem-solving exams are conducive to active learning methods. Modify your problems and experiment with different variables. Don't just memorise definitions, play around with the material: can you identify the concept from its definition only? Can you provide an example of each concept, or show where someone has used the concept in a practical way? Can you explain the idea to someone else? This type of preparation can also be done successfully in study groups, as explaining a problem to a friend is a great way to revise it yourself.

Preparing for essays

The best way to prepare for essay-based exams is to write essays under exam conditions; i.e. timed and with a word limit. Make sure you don't just stop there; have someone whose opinions you value check the essay for you and give some feedback.

Preparing for take-home essay exams

Take home exams are commonly used in Humanities subjects. These are usually long essays (up to 3,000 words) which you have a short time to complete (usually 3-7 days).

The key to doing well in any essay-based exam is to answer the question asked without simply regurgitating material you have learnt on the topic. Allow yourself some time to brainstorm the essay question and plan a response. The stages are the same as those required for an essay (see **Chapter 4 Writing**), only your research phase will be more limited.

Using your memory

It's important to be able to apply material, but part of successful exam performance is also in recalling information. When recalling information, the emphasis is on working with the ideas, not merely cramming as many facts or ideas as possible into your head.

Theories are important as they help to organise ideas. Once the principles are understood other concepts may become clearer.

Understanding and organising ideas are therefore keys to memory. For example if you understand the principles of why and how an engine works, it is easier to identify a problem and repair a broken-down car.

Repeating things over and over is one way to remember material, but other strategies and factors can influence how you retain information. For example:

Motivation: a real interest in something makes details easier to recall. Think how well you can remember the characters and plot of a movie you like.

Understanding: by understanding something, you can more easily recall the details without learning it by rote; it is also more meaningful to you as real knowledge, not just data.

Organisational patterns: understanding how a certain system is organised allows easier recall of the separate parts that contribute to that system.

Linking: by associating related items or recognising similarities or links between ideas, you will remember them more easily.

Visualisation: imagination enhances memory, and being able to visualise something in a three-dimensional image is a good way to embed knowledge.

Memory aids: a good way to remember items in a list is to use some type of memory aid with other words; for example, FANBOYS represents the seven conjunctions - *For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet* and *So* – that are used as sentence connectors, not sentence starters.

Tips for exam day

Organise getting to the exam

Check all exam information yourself. Do not rely on others for details such as day, time and location of your exams, where you must sit and whether you are allowed to take in any materials (e.g. calculator). Use the Student Portal, LMS or exam noticeboard to check and double check the timetable information.

If you have some time, it is worth going to the location prior to your first exam so that you know exactly where it is. Have a look around; the less mystery there is about the day, the better you will feel.

Maintain a sensible study routine prior to the exam period. If you have morning exams, then make sure you are doing some morning study (between 9am and 12pm) so the exam is not outside of your daily routine; the same goes for afternoon exams.

Allow extra time in your journey for any mishaps (flat tyres, cancelled trains, peak-hour traffic etc.). If you arrive early, use the time to gather your thoughts and calm your nerves. Avoid talking about the exam with other students; comparing study notes could affect your confidence and undermine the positive approach to the exam that you have developed.

Use your reading time

Most exams include 15 minutes of reading time; however, this may vary from subject to subject, so check instructions for each exam. Note that this time is only for reading, as the name suggests, so you cannot write during this time. Reading time also generally begins 15 minutes before the advertised start time.

Use this time to get an overview of the entire paper by skim reading through it first. Read the instructions carefully and work out what you need to do; how many questions you need to answer; marks for each question; and the amount of time you should spend on each question.

Time management: keep an eye on the clock

Effective time management during the exam is an important component of exam success: take in a watch to keep an eye on the time. The more questions you attempt, the more marks you have access to. Thus you need to have a plan to manage your time – and you must stick to this plan. The amount of effort you put into an answer should be proportional to the marks it carries, so you should spend most time on the questions

that are worth the most marks. You'll clearly want to spend more time and effort on a question worth 10 marks than one worth two marks out of 100.

You may choose to answer questions in a different order than that set on the paper. You may decide to answer the questions you find easiest first, to save time for the more difficult answers at the end of the exam. Alternatively, you may choose to answer the questions worth the most first, as you may feel fresher at the start of the exam.

You should attempt **all** questions. Even a simple attempt at an answer can gain you some of the marks for that question. In comparison, it can be very difficult to gain the final 10 or 20 percent of marks (i.e. move your grade from 80% to 100%) in another question by spending more time on it.

Dealing with nerves

Nerves operate in inverse proportion to confidence; the more confidence you have about yourself and your ability to complete the exam questions, the less nervous you are likely to feel. Confidence comes out of preparation; it is easier to feel confident if you are thoroughly prepared for your exams.

A little bit of nervousness is natural; however, if nerves get in the way of your performance at the exam and you're about to drop your bundle (stumble; 'lose it'), then you need to take charge and learn some strategies to deal with nerves.

Strategies

- Learn some deep breathing techniques to help you relax.
- Look after your health during semester and SWOT Vac by eating well and doing some form of exercise.
- Have positive stress releases or study rewards, such as breaks with friends, movies, sports or a night out.
- Avoid negative stress releases, such as excessive caffeine intake, energy drinks or smoking.
- Share the load; form a study group – help each other study more effectively.
- Practise positive self-talk to improve your self-confidence.

Help if you need it

There is an undeniable level of stress associated with exams, and the University does have services and processes to cater for the difficulties that some students experience during their studies.

- **Academic Skills:** to help you with making the transition to the Australian study context or with any academic issues including help with creating a study timetable, use the Academic Skills service. Go to <http://services.unimelb.edu.au/academicskills>
- **Counselling and Psychological Services:** Counselling offers psychological support services if you are feeling under pressure or if you feel you just need to talk to someone. Go to <http://services.unimelb.edu.au/counsel>
- **Disability Liaison:** If you need any special arrangements to sit an exam (e.g. extra time to allow for a learning disability or physical disability), you need to organise this early in the semester. The University's Disability Liaison will be able to advise you on the necessary procedures for this. Go to <http://services.unimelb.edu.au/disability>
- **Melbourne Global Mobility (MGM):** MGM may be a useful starting point if you going through a difficult time, but are unsure who to speak to. MGM has a dedicated Study Abroad and Exchange Outreach Adviser who can provide assistance and connect you with the right services. Go to <http://mobility.unimelb.edu.au>
- **Special Consideration:** You are able to submit a request for special consideration if your exam performance is affected on the day (e.g. illness, a car crash or a family crisis). You will need to support this claim, usually with a doctor's certificate or exam supervisor as witness (if you are sick during the exam), or a referral letter from a counsellor. Go to <http://policy.unimelb.edu.au/UOM0376>
- **Supplementary exams ('Supps'):** You may also be offered the chance to sit a supplementary exam. Supps are usually only offered where a fail grade will impede your progress or completion in a subject. Supps are usually held in December/January following Semester 2 and so may not be a viable option for Study Abroad Students. You will need to negotiate with your faculty staff and lecturers if you wish to take this option.

6. HEADING HOME

When your exams and assessments are all finished, you will probably be keen to **shoot through** (get away) and explore the rest of the country, or maybe you need to start a new semester back home. If you have time there are plenty of tours available for students through student travel centres.

Make sure you attend any 'returning home' programs and briefings, as they may provide both your last chance to exchange addresses with Study Abroad friends or vital information affecting your departure (e.g. taxes, fees and refunds, notification of results, program feedback etc.). Ensure that the university has a correct forwarding email address for you, or you may miss out on any vital post-departure information.

Just as you needed to adjust to the Australian culture on arrival, you will now need to re-adapt to your home country. This can be awkward at first. You have had different experiences from your friends at home who haven't lived in another

country and you will have changed (even if it's not obvious to you!). Likewise, you may have missed some events that have brought your friends and family closer. However, with time you will re-establish the links that may have loosened a little while you were away.

The most notable difference that students comment on when returning home, is a new appreciation of their own culture. As an outsider returning home, there is a tendency to see things that you took for granted prior to departure, in a new light. You should expect that it will take some time to reassess these changes. This is all part of the cross-cultural experience and it will enrich your life and change your perspective not only of home, but of other cultures you encounter.

We hope that your stay has been a successful and enjoyable one and that you will return to Australia, whether for more study or just for a holiday.

See ya (goodbye)!







Move to Melbourne.

Melbourne



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

<http://services.unimelb.edu.au/academicsskills>

Copyright

© Copyright University of Melbourne 2013.
Copyright in this publication is owned by the University and no part of it may be reproduced without the permission of the University.

CRICOS PROVIDER CODE: 00116K

Authorised by: Director, Student Services

Published by: Academic Skills

Disclaimer

The University has used its best endeavours to ensure that material contained in this publication was correct at the time of printing. The University gives no warranty and accepts no responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of information and the University reserves the right to make changes without notice at any time in its absolute discretion. The University reserves the right to make changes to the programs advertised as appropriate.

Statement on privacy policy

When dealing with personal or health information about individuals, the University of Melbourne is obliged to comply with the *Information Privacy Act 2000* and the *Health Records Act 2001*. For further information refer to: www.unimelb.edu.au/unisec/privacypolicy.htm

Intellectual property

For further information refer to: www.unimelb.edu.au/Statutes