



MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR DEGREE

# Surviving & *Thriving* at University

*The transition to university is bigger than the academics alone. A practical guide to the study skills, independence, and wellbeing that turn a place into a genuine success.*

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# A Different Kind of *Learning*

University is not "school but harder." It is a fundamentally different model of learning — and the students who understand that early adapt fastest.

At school, learning is delivered: teachers chase the work, structure the time, and cover the syllabus. At university, learning is *self-directed*. Nobody checks whether you did the reading. Lectures introduce ideas; the real understanding happens in the hours you choose to put in afterwards. This freedom is exhilarating — and it is where unprepared students quietly fall behind.

THE SINGLE BIGGEST SHIFT

Contact hours drop dramatically. A humanities student may have only 8–10 timetabled hours a week. That is not a lighter workload — it is the same workload, with the expectation that you fill the rest of the time yourself. Independent study *is* the degree.

## What Changes

| AT SCHOOL                | AT UNIVERSITY                    |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Teachers chase your work | Nobody checks — it is on you     |
| Structured timetable     | Large unstructured blocks        |
| Content spoon-fed        | You build understanding yourself |
| Frequent feedback        | Sparse, high-stakes feedback     |

# Study Skills That *Actually Work*

University rewards specific, learnable habits. These are the ones that consistently separate thriving students from struggling ones.

1

## **Treat it like a job**

Aim for 35–40 focused hours a week including lectures. Turn up, do the work, keep weekends mostly free. Structure beats motivation.

2

## **Read actively, not passively**

Never just highlight. Ask of every text: what is the argument, what is the evidence, do I agree? Take notes in your own words.

3

## **Start assignments early**

The single highest-impact habit. Early starts allow drafts, feedback, and thinking time. Late starts guarantee mediocrity.

4

## **Use office hours**

Lecturers hold them and almost nobody comes. Bring one good question and you instantly stand out — and learn more.

### THE COMPOUNDING EFFECT

Falling two weeks behind in a subject that builds on itself — maths, sciences, languages — is very hard to recover from. Staying current is far easier than catching up.

**Consistency early prevents crisis later.**

# Independence & *Life Admin*

For many students, university is the first experience of running their own life. The academic side rarely fails in isolation — it fails when everything else becomes overwhelming.

## **Money**

Budget the loan across the whole term, not the first fortnight. Know exactly what comes in, what goes out, and what is left. Financial stress corrodes academic focus faster than almost anything.

## **Food, Sleep & Movement**

Unglamorous, but foundational. A student who eats properly, sleeps enough, and moves regularly will out-perform a stressed, nocturnal, takeaway-fuelled one every time — regardless of raw ability.

## **Time**

Freedom without structure is a trap. Build a simple weekly rhythm: fixed study blocks, protected downtime, and a clear line between the two. The calendar is your friend.

## **For Parents**

The hardest part is stepping back. Your instinct is to solve problems; the more useful role now is to be a sounding board they can call when they choose to. Let them handle the small crises — that is how the independence is built.

## Wellbeing & *Knowing When to Ask*

The most important skill at university is not academic. It is recognising when you are struggling, and reaching for support without shame.

Every university has substantial support that students routinely under-use: academic tutors, wellbeing services, counselling, disability and study-support teams, and students' union advice. Using them is a sign of competence, not weakness. The students who thrive ask for help *early* — before a wobble becomes a crisis.

### THE WARNING SIGNS

Persistent low mood, avoiding lectures, sleep falling apart, isolating from friends, or feeling permanently behind. If two or more persist for more than a couple of weeks, that is the signal to reach out — not to push harder alone.

### FOR STUDENTS

Homesickness and doubt in the first term are near-universal, even among students who look completely settled. It usually passes. Talk to someone rather than deciding, alone at 2am, that you have made a mistake.

### FOR PARENTS

Stay in touch without hovering. A regular, low-pressure call gives them a line home. Listen more than you advise — often they need to think aloud, not be fixed.

## The First-Term *Playbook*

A simple checklist for the first weeks. Do these and you will settle faster than most.

- ☐ Set up a realistic weekly study timetable in week one
- ☐ Locate the library, your department, and support services early
- ☐ Introduce yourself to at least one person in each seminar
- ☐ Join two societies — one familiar, one completely new
- ☐ Register with a local GP
- ☐ Set a term budget and track it weekly
- ☐ Attend the first lecture of every module, without exception
- ☐ Go to one set of office hours in the first month
- ☐ Establish a regular contact rhythm with home
- ☐ Cook at least three proper meals a week

*“The students who thrive are rarely the most naturally gifted. They are the ones who built good habits in the first month, before anyone was watching.”*

DR KRISHAN P. CHAUHAN

### ONGOING ACADEMIC SUPPORT

University-level tuition and mentoring can make the difference in demanding degrees — particularly in the sciences and quantitative subjects. For support that continues beyond school, reach us at [apexacademicconsultancy.com](https://apexacademicconsultancy.com).