

# Independent learning: advice from students.

Possibly the most distinctive thing about studying at university is the level of independence that you have. For some people this is an ongoing part of their independence developed prior to starting at university. For others, it can feel like a big step-up from previous experiences in education.

We asked some students how they felt about independent learning when they started their courses, and what advice they might give to new and prospective university students. Here are some of their thoughts.

## Free time.

*“...there are very few contact hours at uni and being disciplined to get up in the morning can be quite a struggle.”*

*“...you’ll probably feel like you’ve got loads of time on your hands when actually this time is supposed to be used doing work.”*

Contact hours are the times when you are timetabled to do something specific – lectures, seminars, tutorials and practicals. On some courses these may take up much of your week, but on some others they may take up only perhaps 5–15 hours altogether. This leaves a lot of non-contact time, but although it may feel free, if you want to succeed then you will need to use this time to study.

The kinds of tasks you might do in your independent study time include:

- Reading and thinking about some of the books and articles on reading lists, and perhaps making notes.
- Talking about aspects of your subject with others on your course.
- Reviewing lecture notes and handouts.
- Planning and completing assignments, for example, group presentations, essays.
- Working with a specialist tutor to improve your academic skills.

The number of hours that you devote to study each week will vary through the year, and from year to year. For full-time, campus-based, first-year undergraduate students, an average of around 30 hours per week (including contact time) is probably about right.

*“Self-discipline is definitely key at university as it can be extremely easy to fall into the role of student bum!”*

## Task and time management.

*“You may have several deadlines in a short amount of time... this requires you to organise your time effectively.”*

*“It is not your tutor or your lecturer who will remind you of deadlines or collect work from you... It is your responsibility to meet the deadline because no-one will chase your work for you.*

It is a really good idea to use a wall-planner (or a reliable electronic equivalent) to be constantly aware of multiple deadlines and work out in advance which bits of which tasks will be done at what times. Other task- and time-management skills, such as prioritising and being able to break tasks down into manageable chunks, are equally important.

*“I think the most important thing to remember is that although deadlines seem far away at university, your time flies by, and you don’t want to expect the book to be on the shelf the night before an essay is due in.”*

## Lectures and seminars

*“...it may be up to you whether you attend lectures or not, although missing any makes it harder to catch up, and some courses will take disciplinary action if you are noticed as being missing on a regular basis.”*

*“The length of the lecture can vary and you cannot write everything down that is said, so you need to formulate an appropriate method of note-taking that you can later...use for reference.”*

*“...seminars make the topics covered in lectures simpler to understand and encourage independent discussion in small groups.*

Lectures may well be new to many beginning students. You are not expected to know straight away how best to learn from lectures (and other sources such as journals), but you are expected to find out what works best for you, by reflecting on your experience and consulting printed and online study skills guidance. Your learning is your responsibility.

## Help and support

*“...if you need help at uni, you have to seek it. Help will not come and find you.”*

*“...at college the teachers knew what I found hard but at uni the lecturers didn’t know what I found hard and I had to explain to them...”*

Your personal tutor (and perhaps other lecturers), student services staff (such as counsellors, chaplains and ASK tutors) and very importantly your peers can all support your independent learning – but only if you take action to speak to and work with them.

*“...utilise all the resources you have available to you...”*

If you would like an ASK tutorial please contact us.

Email: [academicskills@port.ac.uk](mailto:academicskills@port.ac.uk).

Phone: 02392 843462.

Visit: Third Floor, Nuffield Building.

Resource revised 2019.

