Getting Started at University
The Student Learning Advisory Service
28/09/2016

Shaun Theobald
srt@kent.ac.uk
The Student Learning Advisory Service
Aims of this workshop

• To reflect on the experience of starting university study
• To outline ways of managing your learning and study effectively
• To provide some brief generic advice on core study skills areas
  – Academic reading; academic writing; note-taking etc.
Build on existing strengths!

• The “I can do this...” model works by building on experience

• Activity – 2 minutes! Either on your own, or talk to the person next to you...
  – What strengths do you bring to university study?
  – Jot down a few points
Probable examples

• Time management, organisation & self-discipline
• Concentration and application
• Revision and exams
• Learning new subjects/information
• Adapting to change
• *Practical study skills techniques*
Going forwards...

• You will need to revise, expand and enhance your existing skills ....
• But build on them!!
What are the possible (likely?) challenges of University study?

• Varies from individual to individual, clearly...
• But common factors are:
  • Language
    – Pre-requisite; progression; credit framework etc.
  • Assessments
    - Amount; frequency; multiple dead-lines
  • Depth and pace of study
    • Everything seems to happen very quickly: ‘one big topic per week/seminar’
• The amount of reading
What are the possible (likely?) challenges of University study?

• Underpinning study skills
  – Especially writing
• Using evidence effectively
• Referencing
• Avoiding unintentional plagiarism
• Seminars
• Lectures
  • How to learn effectively from lectures
Where to get help: SLAS

• The Student Learning Advisory Service

• Ways of helping you...
  – 1. Resource Bank: books to borrow [Library], study guides to take away (free)
  – 2. On-line resources + downloads
  – 3. Workshops
  – 4. 1:1 Advice & guidance appointments: includes Maths!
  – 5. Academic Peer Mentoring
  – [6. The VALUE Programme (for some schools)]

• www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/learning
Referencing

• [https://www.kent.ac.uk/ai/](https://www.kent.ac.uk/ai/)
• The Academic Integrity web pages explore
• A. The underpinning concepts of academic writing/study
  – Using sources/plagiarism/avoiding plagiarism etc.
• B. Referencing systems
  – Harvard/MHRA/Chicago etc.

• *Please make sure you are familiar with all of this!*
Other sources of support

• Counselling service
• Disability and Dyslexia Support Services
• Kent Students’ Union
• Academic Advisors in Schools
• Student Support Officers in Schools
• Academic Liaison Librarians
• IT Helpdesk
• The Personal Academic Support System (PASS)
Information, information, information

• You will receive a deluge of new information
• Be selective: concentrate on the essentials
  – Faculty Handbook
  – Credit framework
  – Module guide
  – School Handbook
  – Moodle
Information, information, information

• Write down questions as they occur to you!
  – Keep a ‘notebook’/record of anything that concerns you

• Much information will be delivered electronically
  – Organise your files and data

• Many links will be password-protected
  – Establish good practice in password use!
Information, information, information

• Keep all course literature and school guidelines
• Get to know your seminar leaders, the personal tutorial system etc.
• Use e-mail selectively and effectively to clarify things
Using the Library

• More complex than other libraries you have used?
• Organise your library use and research skills
• Seek guidance – use induction events, subject guides + subject librarians (Academic Liaison Librarians)
  http://www.kent.ac.uk/library/subjects/index.html
• Be creative: you need to use texts; journals and electronic/multi-media material
• Start using journals as soon as you can
• Spend some time in the library! Don’t be apprehensive...
Managing reading

• Remember you can’t read everything
• Be selective and seek guidance
• Use reading lists selectively and effectively
• Share resources
• Remember to ‘read for different purposes’: skim – scan – read for detail
• Read actively
  – Brief notes
Writing essays and reports

• Seek help where needed
• Follow guide-lines
• Remember the importance of
  – structure
  – clarity
  – focus on the question
Writing essays and reports

• Remember the golden rules of academic writing:
  – independent evaluation
  – evaluation supported by informed reading and preparation
  – evidence always provided
  – citations & references always provided
Two key ‘overview’ elements to academic writing

• PDW
• Plan – draft – write – (edit)
• In this order
• IDC
• Introduction – development – conclusion
• The basic structure of most academic writing
• 20% + 80% + 20%...(approximately!)
Time management

• The basic ‘maths’!....
• 120 credits
• 10 hours study per credit
• 1200 hours study in total
• 30 weeks of the academic year
• 40 hours per week...
• You will feel ‘pressurised’ at times, but there is time to manage what you need to do!
Time management

• Use some form of **schedule** to map out your commitments
  – Daily, weekly, monthly and termly
• Have clear – and realistic – **targets**
• Have clear **priorities**
• Keep a **record** of what you need to do!
• **Review** time-keeping records regularly
Working with your learning style

• A. Is your learning style:
  – Visual?
  – Aural?
  – Kinaesthetic?
  – Based on writing/written reflection?

• B. Do you fit the Honey & Mumford model?

• [http://www.brainboxx.co.uk/a2_learnstyles/pages/learningstyles.htm](http://www.brainboxx.co.uk/a2_learnstyles/pages/learningstyles.htm)
Working with your learning style

• So, are you:
  – An activist
  – A reflector
  – A pragmatist
  – A theorist

• Note that, whatever your personal preferences for any of the above, successful learning involves a blend of learning styles!
Communication

• Talk to other students!
• Talk to staff!
• Office hours
• Preliminary e-mail
  – Clearly planned; not rapid-fire ‘tweets’!
• Ask questions
• Make sure that you deal with any difficulties via formal university/department procedures
The skills and aptitudes we expect...

- Managing deadlines
- Getting things done
- Trying out new things
- Finding information
- Evaluating information
- Explaining your view
- Presenting information
- Speaking to others: sometimes groups
The skills and aptitudes we expect...

- Writing long texts
- Working with others
- Reading for information
- Using PCs/www/Moodle etc.
- Making decisions
- Explaining a process or concept
- Working with data
- Working with theory and abstract models...
You can expect from us...

- High standards of teaching
- Fair marking
- Feedback on performance
- Transparency of decisions
- Timely information/communication
- Support and guidance
- Finally....
An academic’s view....

• How to succeed at university – 6 key points

• Attend lectures and seminars
• Start work early!
• In written work especially: less description, more reflection
An academic’s view....

• Practise selective academic reading
• Remember that academic thought is always evaluative and evidential
• Get hold of all the course documents!
Academic survival

• The learning advisor’s view – 5 key points
• Use short periods of concentration that build up to longer ones!
  – 1 + 1 + 1 hours with short breaks between may be more productive than 3 hours in one ‘block’
• Try and manage your time
• Record all sources that you use!
  – You may want to use something for an assignment later on
Academic survival

• If you run out of time for reading, *some* reading is better than no reading!

• Don’t take too many notes while you read
  – Avoid the problem of being ‘bogged’ down in reading...’light touch’ notes
GOOD LUCK
for all your studies!
The Student Learning Advisory Service
www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/learning