Tips on getting started at university

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Tips on getting started
Your first few weeks at university can get pretty stressful, especially if you haven't been involved in formal education for a while. A lot of that stress comes from not knowing things like what you supposed to do, where things are, who to ask. The information in this guide will help you lighten at least a bit of that load. Below is a list of things that will help you.

To get started:
- read through your Unit Information Guides (UIG)
- read through your assessment tasks
- understand what each part of your study material is for
- navigate your way around MySCU and Learning sites
- use Session & Weekly planners to manage your time
- make use of services & strategies to help beat the stress.

Read through your Unit Information Guide (UIG)
The Unit Information Guide for each unit is a very important document. Do not underestimate how important it is! Your UIG is like a roadmap for the unit. It has important information to help you with your studies, including:

- **Assessment details:** Know your due dates, word limits and marking criteria for your assignments from Day 1.
- **Aims, objectives and graduate attributes:** These are linked to your assessment tasks.
- **Syllabus:** This gives you a clear picture of the unit content.
Quick Guide

- **Prescribed texts and materials**: These are required readings. It helps if you know what you have to read from early on.

- **Recommended reference material**: Revisit this list for each assignment.

- **Referencing style**: This tells you which referencing style you have to use for your writing. An easy way to lose marks for no reason is to reference wrongly or use the wrong style. Find out which referencing style you need to use in each unit and stick to it.

- **Suggested study timetable**: Use the weekly outline of topics to plan your study. This helps you to get organised so you don’t fall behind. Falling behind is a major cause of stress.

- **Where to get help**: If you don’t know something or if you are having trouble don’t be afraid to ask. It might be something that is easily resolved by just knowing the right person to ask. You’ve worked hard to get to uni, don’t blow it because you didn’t ask for a hand when you needed one. It’s OK to seek help and the earlier you do the better. It’s often quite easy to stop little problems from becoming big problems if you do something early enough.

Quite a lot of students get themselves stressed out over things that they could have found the answer to just by reading the Unit Information Guide. Print out your UIG and keep it nearby and refer to it often!

**Read through your assessment tasks early and carefully**

- In Week 1 read through ALL your assessment tasks for the session and think about how they relate to the unit objectives.

- For each assessment task, ask yourself, “What is this about? What is the main topic?”

- Write down the topic and display it somewhere obvious—this will help you to read actively and purposefully as you work your way through the study material.

- Start recording or highlighting any information that may be related to your assessment tasks from Day 1 —this will save you time locating this information later for assignments and exams!

- When you have a choice of assignment topics, the earlier you make your choice the better.

- Code information related to each assessment task using different coloured post-it notes or highlighters. Alternatively, start a resource list for each task to locate information quickly when you need it or use technology you feel comfortable with to record information.

**Understand what each part of your study materials is for**

Most study materials can be found on MySCU. Go to the Learning Site for the unit and look in Unit Documents. Study material is also provided on CD for some units. Study materials will vary from unit to unit, so always check your UIG for details. Study materials might include:

- **Study Guide**: This is broken up into modules or topics and provides the main ideas and concepts for the unit. It guides you through the unit, directs you to readings and other study material, and often provides activities to reinforce your learning.

- **Prescribed Text**: This is essential for your study in the unit as it presents the main ideas and you will refer to it often in your assessment tasks.
• **Readings:** These are carefully selected readings and they will give you valuable information for assignments. They might be available in different formats: as a printed book, on CD, or through the myReadings service.

• **Learning Sites:** Might also provide supplementary study material and updated assignment information posted by your lecturer. Check your Learning Site and email regularly for updates and announcements.

**Learn to navigate your way around MySCU and the Learning sites**

MySCU lets you access resources, communication tools and links that are important for your study. From MySCU you can access the Learning site (often called Blackboard) for each of the your units.

**MySCU Home Page**

• Spend time navigating your way around this page. Note all the support services at your fingertips.
• All the Learning Sites for your enrolled units are listed in the centre of the page. Click on the unit name to go directly to the site.
• Find direct links to Webmail, Timetables, My Enrolments, Library and Technology Services.
• If you need help in MySCU go to the Student Guide. This is in the Quick Starts on the left hand side.

**Learning sites**

• Spend time navigating your way around this page – pay close attention to the links on the left. These will vary from unit to unit.
• Check the Noticeboard regularly for important messages posted by your lecturer/tutor.
• Go to the Unit Documents to find most of your unit material and links to myReadings and other resources.
• Read and participate in the Discussion Forums, especially those related to assessment tasks.
• Most units require you to submit your assignments from the Learning Site.
• Find contact details for staff members here and email them and other students directly from the site.

**Use session and weekly planners to manage your time**

If you are organised and manage your time well you will find it easier to cope with your study and the other commitments in your life.

Here are some strategies that will help you:

• Read through all assessment details at the beginning of the teaching session. This will help you to estimate the time needed to complete each task so that you can plan ahead.
• Follow the Suggested Study Timetable in the UIG (this is usually at the back of the guide).
• Use class and tutorial time to find out more about assessment tasks and to clarify what is expected. Never be afraid to ask.
• Use a Session Planner (see A step-by-step guide to planning for your assignments Quick Guide) to help you map out the due dates for all assessment tasks for ALL the units you are currently enrolled in.

• Use a Weekly Planner (see Managing your time Quick Guide) to help you map out regular commitments including classes, unit study session, work, child care and so on. This will help clarify how much time you can commit to study and assignment preparation.

Some study tips
• Break large tasks into smaller, more manageable steps. (Eat the elephant one bite at a time.)
• Use lists to plan, prioritise and organise study sessions.
• Set yourself small goals and reward yourself when you achieve them. (The distance between the start and the finish gets shorter with each step you take.)
• Ask questions and ask for a hand early, before things get out of hand.
• Be realistic when setting goals. It’s better to set a few small goals and achieve them one at a time than to set one big goal and fall short.
• Take some time out. Time with family and having fun is just as important as study. It’s all about balance! Sometimes taking a day off is the best thing you can do in the long run.

Make use of services and strategies to help beat the stress
Coming to university is such a big change and it is not unusual to feel overwhelmed or stressed, especially during the first part of your first session of study. However, you can take steps to reduce the pressure. Developing a healthy balance between study, work, family and lifestyle will help you beat study stress and succeed at university.

There are many support services and resources at university to help you beat the stress. Visit the University's Orientation site for links to counselling, gym, mentors, Academic Skills Development and much more.

Remember, if you are feeling stressed, seek help early.

A link to Assignment Navigator: Getting Started

Related Quick Guides
What is in a Unit Information Guide, Managing your time, A step by step guide to planning your assignments