Studying Online

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Advantages and challenges of online learning

Recognise the advantages

Typically, courses in higher education involve a large amount of time spent in online study. Most provide information, journal articles, guidance, activities, administration, communications and even classes online and digitally. This has brought great opportunities to enhance learning. Below is a list of just a few. If you wish, you can indicate which of these matter most to you [√].

Having a 'safety net'

- ❑ Catching up on work if you miss a class or session through illness or other unavoidable circumstances.
- ❑ Easier to go back over material you find difficult to understand or remember.

Personalising your learning

- ❑ Working at your own pace. Moving onto new material when you are ready.
- ❑ Fitting learning around other demands when needed.
- ❑ Using opportunities to go over material again until you 'get it!'.
- ❑ Being more independent in your approach to your own studies.

> ### ⓘ Find out more
>
> For more about personalising your learning, see the module **Getting ready for academic study** and *The Study Skills Handbook*, chapter 4.

More active, flexible, varied learning

- ❑ Being able to study almost anywhere, anytime.
- ❑ More tools available to teaching staff, so they can vary their teaching techniques, bringing greater interest.
- ❑ Greater emphasis on 'doing' – more likely to include tasks and activities rather than just listening and note-making.
- ❑ Increased opportunities for student voices and contributions.

Greater interest

- ❑ Enables more varied teaching than the traditional lecture.
- ❑ Better task design – to encourage participation and engagement.
- ❑ Less emphasis on testing and assessment.

Greater emphasis on community

- ❑ More ways of people taking part: broader opportunities for collaborative learning and interacting with others.
- ❑ Everyone can take part – rather than just those most confident at speaking or interacting in class.
- ❑ Lots of ways of sharing ideas, tips, resources, tasks and support. However, see also *Share with Care.*

Efficiency

- ❑ Less time spent travelling onto campus or other study sites.
- ❑ More students can use the same resources at the same time.
- ❑ Access to a much wider range of resources for all on the course.
- ❑ For many activities or quizzes, you can receive instant automatic feedback rather than having to wait until teaching staff have marked work.

Inclusiveness and safety

- ❑ More people get a chance to contribute.
- ❑ Students who find it hard to contribute in class can find it easier to contribute online.
- ❑ It enables study to continue safely despite difficult circumstances such as pandemics.
- ❑ Students with disabilities, or who are ill or who find it hard for other reasons to get onto campus can still take part.

Developing employability skills

- ❑ Many jobs now require employees to be able to work effectively at home or away from the workplace; managing independent study at home provides good practice.
- ❑ You gain familiarity with integrating multiple technologies into your everyday work practice.

❑ You can develop useful skills in communicating and collaborating with people other than family and friends.

Appreciate the positives!

If you experience times when you don't feel like working independently and online, boost your mood by reminding yourself of the advantages and benefits that you identified above. You can, of course, link up with others students for social learning and support, or put aside your screen and work on paper for a while instead.

Manage the challenges

Online learning brings its own challenges. It can be hard to get started, pace your study, stay motivated and manage time effectively. It might, at times, be lonely, boring or over-distracting. If all, or most, of your study, is online, it might feel sometimes as if you can never switch off and that there are no boundaries between study and the rest of your life. Being aware of such challenges helps you know what to expect so you can prepare for them and better manage your studies.

Decide which of these challenges are relevant to you [√]. Then select from the suggested ways of addressing each.

☐ Creating a good study space

Make the space work

If you are able to set up a permanent study space at home or work, this can be useful for getting settled quickly into study.

~ Aim to make your study space inviting. Clear away clutter. Keep it clean.

~ Position yourself to avoid direct light on your screen. Use a lamp or blinds to provide the level of light you prefer.

~ Keep together in one place the equipment and resources that you need.

~ Let others know when they can contact you – and when not to disturb you.

~ Tidy your space before you leave it, so that it is ready for you to study next time.

Not got a study space?

If you are not able to set up a permanent study space, don't worry. Online learning lends itself to any setting. You can set up a 'good enough' study space almost anywhere.

~ Invest in a lap desk with a soft cushion and clip board so you can work comfortably on a flat surface when sitting on a chair or on your bed. They are not expensive.

~ Put your books, notebooks, planner, pencil case and other study items into a transparent bag so that you can transport them easily and see what you need at a glance.

~ Carry ear-plugs or earphones so that you can block out distracting noises.

~ If you can use a table at home for some of the time, gather your study materials together onto a tray that you can move easily onto the table at one go.

☐ Getting started / keeping going

- Gain a good overview of the course. It reduces the anxiety of uncertainty and helps you plan ahead. Use the *Gain an overview* checklist to guide you.
- Create a workable daily routine – and stick to it. It is easier to start work each day or study session when you follow a set routine.
- Create a hook. When you finish work for the day or for a study session, jot down a question to answer or action to complete as soon as you begin next time. Do that first – and you have got off to a good start!

> **◉ Take action: Gain an overview**
>
> Check off ☑ each item below once you have completed it.
>
> - ❑ **First port of call.** Who should I contact first if I need essential information to get going or if I experience problems with the course?
> - ❑ **Tutors.** Which staff teach which aspects of the course? What other roles, if any, do these staff have on the course?
> - ❑ **Technology.** Which technologies are used for the course? What will I need to own/purchase/download and by when?
> - ❑ **Resources.** What materials and resources should I have received or have access to? Have I got all of this?
> - ❑ **Dates.** What are the key dates and times to put into my planner/diary (such as course start and finish dates, discussion groups times, times new material is uploaded, etc.)
> - ❑ **Syllabus.** What is the syllabus (what topics and themes are we going to cover)?
> - ❑ **Learning outcomes.** What are the main learning objectives or outcomes for this course? Where are each of these covered in the course?
> - ❑ **Workload.** What work am I expected to do – and by when? Write all key dates into diary/planner.
> - ❑ **Preparatory work**. Is there work set to complete or to prepare before online sessions? When and how do I find out about this?
> - ❑ **Assessment.** How will my learning be assessed? When and how does that occur? Are examples, quizzes, past papers or other practice materials provided?
> - ❑ **Assessment criteria.** What criteria are used to assess and grade work?
> - ❑ **Feedback.** When and how is feedback provided to students on their work?

- ❑ **Support.** What support is available to me as a student? What do I need to do to receive this?
- ❑ **Class.** Who else is in my class? What is provided to help students communicate socially or academically?
- ❑ **Employability.** How, if at all, will this help me in developing new skills and enhancing employability or career plans?

☐ Pacing my studies

- ∼ Have a plan. Map out broadly when you will start and finish each aspect of your plan. Spread your studying more or less evenly over the length of the course.
- ∼ Whilst it can be useful to pace study to suit you, make sure you don't miss out on discussions and key events in your courses, such as assignments. These might require you to participate at given times.
- ∼ Don't be tempted to leave large chunks of work until the last minute. For example, if your lectures are available online, listen to some each week.
- ∼ Create breaks at intervals that work for you – over the year, term, week, day and study sessions, so that your brain has a chance to refresh.

☐ Staying motivated

- ∼ Make a poster or use a screensaver that reminds you of your main purpose for being on the course. Look at this regularly to remind yourself of your goals.
- ∼ Avoid procrastination – continually putting things off until tomorrow. It drains energy. Use a planner to time tasks so that you don't feel as though you are falling behind.
- ∼ Use active learning techniques that include plenty of short, relevant tasks. Set yourself challenges and targets to add interest to study tasks you find less interesting.
- ∼ Involve others. Study alongside people who are well-motivated or who are happy to encourage you to keep going.
- ∼ Set yourself tasks you can accomplish, realistically, within a study session or during the day; give yourself a chance to experience that you are making progress.

Give yourself a pep talk

However interesting your course, you can expect your interest to wane from time to time. There might be times when you really don't want to study. When studying independently, it can be easy to keep putting off study until later.

It is up to you to keep yourself on track. You will probably have a good sense of what you need to do – even if you don't feel like it – so rally yourself to get study done earlier rather than later. It cuts down on stress and enables you to enjoy relaxing later, knowing your work is done.

ⓘ Find out more

For more about staying motivated and using active learning techniques, see the module **Getting ready for academic study** and *The Study Skills Handbook*.

☐ Managing my time

~ Put aside for study and respect it as you would time for employment in a job.

~ Create a schedule so you know what you need to do and when. Stick to it. If you can't, update it rather than abandon it altogether.

~ Use a student planner or diary systematically. Check and update it frequently.

~ Become more time aware. Monitor your time use so you know where it goes.

~ Plan time for things you need and want to do apart form study – so that you have a rounded experience and are not distracted by the feeling of missing out.

~ Work at a good pace – so you keep up with the course.

Reflection: Using spare moments

Not all study needs to be undertaken in long sessions. Many aspects of online learning can be undertaken in spare moments. For example, if you have only five minutes to spare, you could check a discussion board or post your own comments. Using spare moments here and there can be free up other study time for larger or more complex tasks.

What kinds of study tasks could you fit into spare moments during the day?

Find out more

For more about time management, see the module **Time management** and *The Study Skills Handbook* or *50 Ways to Manage Time*.

☐ Avoiding loneliness during study

~ Arrange specific times in the day to connect up with others so you know you have times planned for being sociable.

~ Aim to talk with at least one person regularly, even if just by phone. Don't just send texts and posts. Choose some times for communicating when you can see each other, such as by WhatsApp, Skype, FaceTime or Zoom.

~ Share your experiences. Others will probably be going through similar. Exchange points of interest and curiosity. Share tips and ideas on how to work more effectively. Don't sink into shared negativity.

~ Create points for connection. Find out what others like most about their study and ask them about that. Ask what others have been reading.

~ Check whether anyone needs help in understanding concepts – or could help you to understand something with which you are stuck. Helping others to understand a concept or problem helps with our own future recall and understanding too.

~ Find tasks you can share with others. See *Collaborative study* and *Share with care.*

☐ Managing boredom

~ Consider why you feel bored. It might, for example, be because of a lack of social input or not having sufficient mental challenge or from taking a monotonous approach to study tasks.

~ Mix it up. Use different approaches to study across the day and week. Work on your own for tasks that require you to concentrate. Link up with other students for tasks that can be shared. Work at a desk for some of the time. Vary your location for reading or thinking about your study.

~ Vary your tasks. Avoid reading and note-making for long periods of time. Move between posing questions, reading, making notes, listening to podcasts, solving problems, working out your own ideas, planning tasks, writing up sections of assessments, improving a written draft, revising, etc.

~ Talk about what you have been studying with others on your course – or anyone who is interested. Ask others about the reading or tasks they have been doing.

~ Set yourself time challenges. If study is boring, time can feel as if it is moving too slowly. Set yourself specific times to complete a task – with just enough time to complete the task.

~ Add more challenge, if tasks seem too easy. For example, set yourself some challenging questions to answer through your reading, or read a more advanced text, or find ways of weaving more advanced material into your assignment without forcing the point.

☐ Managing distractions

~ Monitor your time. Be aware of what distracts you and where you waste time.

~ If other people distract you, explain what you need. Arrange times to speak with them or to do things with them when you are not studying.

~ Create time in the day to do things that you enjoy – so you don't feel you are missing out.

~ Make sure your day has enough time for varied activities, including rest, relaxation, exercise, eating, socialising and everyday business. Otherwise, these tend to intrude as distractions.

~ If you are easily distracted, arrange with a friend or classmate to check in with each other, briefly, at specific times, to check you are keeping to your routine and work schedule. Agree to encourage each other to stay on track.

☐ Forming effective study habits

~ Select a manageable number of habits to work on. Focussing on just three or four at a time is sufficient and realistic for most people. Avoid selecting an unrealistic number of things to change all at once.

~ Give it time. Monitor on a daily basis for several weeks. It takes at least 6-8 weeks for most people to change a bad habit.

~ Use a daily planner with a habit-shaping tool to set and track daily goals. There are also many habit tracking apps from which to select.

~ Be prepared to start again. Don't be discouraged if you slip back into old habits. Just recognise that you have – and start from where you left off. Starting a few times can help reinforce the habit.

ⓘ Find out more

For more about forming effective study habits, see *The Bloomsbury Student Planner* or the trackers in the *50 Ways* series.

⊘ Take action

Select just two or three actions from the bullets above that you consider would be most useful to you just now. Decide when you will carry out each. Then write the details into your academic diary or student planner – to remind you to carry them out.

Avoid overload

Online resources, digital communication and social media are great for keeping us informed and connected. However, the constant flow can eat into our time, draining our energies and even affect our wellbeing.

Whilst social media can add interest to the day, boost our sense of connection and reduce social isolation, using these too much wastes time, stimulates negativity and can be anxiety-provoking. Don't just assume this will sort itself out. Make a conscious decision about which platforms you will use, when, why and under which conditions.

Be more self-aware

- Know your personal weak-spots – where do you waste most time and energy on social media?
- Use screen time reports to monitor the time you spend on your phone, media and apps. Use these to make better and informed decisions about how you spend your time.
- Spot your rationalisations: how do you try to justify to yourself that you can or should spend more time online? Don't let yourself get away with these.
- Recognise why overload occurs for you. For example, is it because you are scared of missing out on social life? Or scared to stop studying in case your grades suffer?

Create digital breaks

- Decide what kinds of breaks would be most useful to you. It could be a day a week or certain hours each day.
- Set specific times to check your feeds. Resist checking at other times.
- Create some clear zones in the day when you can focus on other things without distraction. If you find this difficult to do in practice, use apps to help you block access.

Useful apps for blocking

StayFocusd (iOS and Android): You can set limits to how time you spend on sites where you waste time, choosing how much time to allow on each.

SelfControl (iOS only): You decide your own restrictions up to a maximum of 24 hours, either for all the internet or just certain sites.

Anti-Social (Android only): Allows you to block social media and other sites whilst enabling you to do internet research needed for study.

👁 Observation

How many digital breaks do you take each day – and across the week?

Is this sufficient to give you the feeling of having a clean break?

If you don't take breaks, note what stops you, so you can work on that.

Use social media selectively

- Consider the purpose that each platform you use serves in your life – when it serves you best and when it becomes a drain.
- Decide which platforms you enjoy the most and/or which support your studies the best.
- Choose what to use, rather than constantly flitting between platforms and posts.

Do something really different

- Engage in activities that make it harder to keep checking your feeds, such as going for a swim, run, dancing, or other exercise.
- Add a new non-study activity to your day, so that you gain a sense of each day being distinct despite maintaining a steady routine.

Set priorities

- You can't do everything. Decide which tasks are more important and most urgent and attend to those most.
- Decide on the one most important task to accomplish first in the day. Do that first, so that you have an early sense of accomplishment in the day. This can ease the sense of overload.

- Take note of the things you do accomplish in the day, as this can be energising. Don't just focus on what remains to be done, as that can drain you of the energy you need to complete them.

> ### (i) Find out more
>
> For more about setting priorities, see the module **Time management** and *The Study Skills Handbook.*

Remember it's OK to stop!

- You don't have to stay connected, ready to respond to every message, just because you are working online. It's ok to switch off, or to ignore feeds.
- Don't set unrealistic expectations for yourself. Set a reasonable number of hours to study each day.
- Avoid putting too much pressure on yourself. Setting a good routine can help to maintain boundaries between study and other aspects of your life.

> ### (•) Take action
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> Of the actions suggested above for managing overload, which would be most helpful to you just now?
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> What would you need to do to put these into place for yourself?
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> Write specific details into your academic diary or student planner – to remind you to carry them out.

Netiquette and communicating online

Remember that employers, family and others you might want or need to impress will be able to see your online communication for many years. Assume that your online communications can be traced back to you. What you post online shapes others' opinions of you. That could affect friendships, relationships and even your chances of gaining jobs you want, so manage your online identity, communications and netiquette with care.

Internet etiquette – or 'netiquette' – is a code of good behaviour, to help oil the wheels of communications online. Using this can protect yourself and others.

Manage your identity

Do

- Consider using different identities for your close personal connections, student identity and public contexts.
- Choose a username or handle that makes you sound serious to future employers.
- Update information on your website and in your profile regularly, so that it is current and accurate.
- Upload material that shows you in a good light. Demonstrate that you are someone who is positive, supportive, helps others, volunteers in the community, a good friend and colleague.

Don't

- Don't post messages when you are very tired, angry, drunk or feeling emotional.
- Don't post material that might suggest to future employers that you are always partying, recovering from parties, lacking ambition or are poorly motivated.
- Don't let old and out-dated information gather. De-clutter your sites so that they look fresh and appealing.
- Don't assume that material will never leak from your personal accounts: always take care to protect your reputation online whatever account you are using.

Show respect

Remember that, even though you might not be able to see or hear them, there are real people at the ends of your posts and messages. They have feelings, just as you do. If you wouldn't say or do something in the presence of people you value, don't write it in social media, emails, discussions or anywhere else online. Treat others as you would like yourself and others you care about to be treated.

Do	Don't
⁓ Check the tone you are using. Be aware of whether come across as rude, angry or complaining.	⁓ Don't get involved in trolling, gaslighting (convincing others that they are wrong) and flaming (sending abusive or angry posts).
⁓ Show gratitude. Say please and thank you. Show appreciation when people comment on your posts or offer you help and support online.	⁓ Don't bully anyone online (or in person!) Check that your communications do not come across as bullying or unpleasant.
⁓ Respect others' opinions, even if you disagree with them. Don't attack people if your views differ.	⁓ Don't insult people, goad them, wind them up or call them names.
⁓ Respect others' time. Stick to the point when making comments or responding, and use the subject line in emails to clarify your message.	⁓ Don't write in capitals – the equivalent of shouting online.
⁓ Respect others' privacy. Don't forward others' private information such as photos, videos or addresses without their explicit permission.	⁓ Don't send large files or 'spam' that take a lot time to process, fill other people's inboxes or crash their servers.
⁓ Respect confidentiality at all times.	⁓ Avoid sending many, or long, messages, videos or jokes that distract them from study or work.
	⁓ Don't sign up to communications using someone else's email address.
	⁓ Don't pass messages sent to you on to others without checking that this is ok first.

Build your profile

Decide what kind of reach you want online, depending on how far you value your privacy.

Do
⁓ Write a short personal statement or biography that summarises the most important points about you.

- Write a longer statement about yourself such as for your Facebook account, webpage or as a blog. Create links to this from other sites you use, so that those who are interested can follow up if they wish.
- Use a photograph, avatar or image that presents you in a positive light to those you might need to impress.
- Use the same photo on each platform you use, to build your personal brand.
- Add material about yourself that builds your professional 'brand'.

Don't

- Don't assume that your online profile does not matter. Many employers will not recruit personnel unless they can vet them online.
- Don't mix public and private aspects of your life. Consider using different accounts for your private life and your more public self.
- Don't put anything online that might undermine the kind of profile or personal brand that you want to create.

(i) Find out more

For more about building your professional reputation and online profile as a student, see *Skills for Success*

Be inclusive

Do

- For communications with class, work or study groups, check that everyone can use platforms selected.
- Be aware of the needs of other students such as those who work, have children or are disabled and aim to find ways of working and communicating that suit them.
- Aim to set up online meetings at times that everyone finds easiest.
- Use humour that everyone can share, understand and enjoy. If you want to share a closed message or in-joke, send it as a private message or save it for later.
- Remember that followers might come from anywhere in the world: help them make sense of what you say by writing clearly and correcting typos.

Don't

- Don't let others feel left out.
- Don't be afraid to ask others if they would like to contribute.
- Don't focus only on those who are the loudest or appear the smartest in the group. Value the contributions that can be made by everyone.
- Don't wait for others to act: take the initiative in drawing people into discussions and chat.

> ### ⓘ Find out more
>
> For more about cultural inclusion, see *The Study Skills Handbook*, chapter 9.

Protect yourself online

Do

- ∿ Install and maintain an up-to-date virus checker. Check whether your college or university provides free anti-virus software.
- ∿ Select your followers carefully. You don't have to accept all invitations.
- ∿ Connect to professional contacts through platforms such as LinkedIn.
- ∿ Set realistic expectations about when you will reply to emails and messages.

Don't

- ∿ Don't share passwords or PINs.
- ∿ Don't get drawn in to arguments, insults, flame wars or abusive behaviour online.
- ∿ Don't follow people whose posts make you angry or unsettled.
- ∿ Don't conduct loud conversations on your phone in public. Remember those around you can see and hear, and might know more about the circumstances than you imagine.

Communicate with care

Do

- ∿ Check the culture and rules of new sites before contributing to them. Lurk a while and gain a feel for the content and tone that are suitable.
- ∿ Check that you have read feeds correctly before firing back a response. It is easy to make mistakes when reading at speed.
- ∿ Read through your own posts before sending them. Check that they say what you intended – and that the message hasn't been altered by the spell-checker or predictive software.
- ∿ Check carefully that you have not included anybody in your emails or feeds that you had not intended – especially if they might be upset by what you have written.

Don't

- ∿ Don't fire off responses without checking your message is accurate. One mistyped letter can change the meaning from positive to negative (such as 'not' rather than 'now).
- ∿ Don't waste others' time by forwarding false news and urban myths.

- Don't forward information about others that might breach other people's confidentiality or privacy. See *Show Respect*.

Take action

Browse your own identity online. What overall impression is created by the information that others can gain about you?

Consider whether your strengths are sufficiently highlighted. if not, provide further positive information about these.

Get the most from online learning

Join in

Whether studying online or in other contexts, the more you engage and join in as an active participant, the more you will learn and the more you will gain from the experience overall.

Online learning tends to make great use of the internet, where sharing is part of the culture. Be ready to share information and to be helpful to others, as well as taking. Supporting others can be a useful way of clarifying your thoughts and a spur to checking you have your facts right. It also reinforces your own learning and recall which helps to master course material.

Engage your mind

- Be curious. Ask your own questions about the course material – and search out answers. Want to know more. Don't be happy with covering the bare minimum.
- Quiz yourself about what you have learnt.
- Before asking for help, see how far you can get in working out solutions for yourself.
- Challenge, mentally, what you see and hear. Be active in looking for alternative interpretations and perspectives. Weigh these up fairly.

> **(i) Find out more**
>
> For more about engaging your mind in what you are studying, see the module **Critical thinking skills**.

Take your space

- You are as important as anybody else on the course. Don't hide away.
- Introduce yourself to others on your course. Let them get to know you.
- Let others know what interests you – it helps them to form a connection with you. They might even send you links to useful resources.
- Let others know when you like their posts. Make comments.

Share

- The internet is built on sharing. Most online courses assume you will share too.

- Share your experiences: it can reassure and help others going through these.

- Let others know of useful reading, resources, apps, networks, links, etc.

Take the initiative

- Don't wait for others to take the lead. Be prepared to make suggestions about how your class or group can support each other's study.

- Consider what you would find it helpful to do, such as having an online reading group, motivation network, quiz group, etc. Then tell others about your idea and ask who else would like to join in.

- Be the first to suggest setting up a new group, social activity, discussion thread, etc.

👁 Observation: How good am I at taking the initiative?

Look through your contributions to online activities that involve others, such as discussions and chat or online groups and classes.

- How do you feel about making contributions that others can see and hear online?

- When, if ever, do you make the first move? For what kinds of contribution are you most comfortable in going first or taking the lead?

Ask for support

- If you find you are struggling with any aspect of your course, ask if others are dealing with the same issues.

- Check whether others have found good resources to use for assignments and projects.

- Let others know what you need.

Identify what you have learnt

When we are studying continually, it can feel as if we are constantly chasing after new information and not really progressing. It is easy to lose track of just how much we are learning and developing. Taking stock on a regular basis not only reinforces our understanding and recall, it can boost motivation too.

- Put aside your notes or screen several times a day; take a few minutes to summarise what you have learnt.

- At the end of the week, remind yourself of what you have covered in that time.

- At the end of a study module or short course, sum up what you think you have learnt. Consider if and how your perspectives on key issues have changed as a result of your study.

- Have you developed any new skills or personal qualities through studying online?

- Share your learning with others – so that you become used to talking about your development. It will help with job interviews and work appraisals.

Create a plan. Set your goals.

A good plan can make every aspect of study easier: it lays out for you the steps you need to take so that your path is more concrete. It might take a little time in the beginning to clarify your thoughts and work out the relevant actions. However, it can save time in the long-run as you don't have to keep working out what you should be doing. It also tends to reduce stress as you have a known way forward.

Aim to stay focussed on the big picture. Remind yourself regularly why you are on this course and what you want to achieve.

Clarify your purpose

- Clarify in your own mind what you want to learn and gain through the course – and why.
- Consider why you are taking this course. What purpose does it have in your life?
- What skills, experience and other attributes do you want to develop on this course that will help your academic, career or life ambitions?
- Are there particular aspects of the course that you want to master?

Set your own goals

- Use your thoughts from above to formulate a set of realistic, manageable, flexible goals to achieve whilst on the course.
- Write these down.
- Use these to help inspire you on days when you need more motivation.
- If they are not motivating you, revisit them to make them more inspiring.

Draw up an action plan

- Identify the actions you need to take to make sure you achieve your goals.
- Draw up a plan or 'roadmap' that shows when you will undertake each of those actions.
- Check whether your goals cover all the learning objectives for the course. If not, identify the actions you would need to achieve those, too. Include these in your plan.
- Make sure that the work you need to undertake for set classes and assignments is built into your plan.

Useful apps for planning

MyLifeOrganised (iOS and Android) – this app helps you manage tasks across different aspects of your life, such as study, work and home. It helps you prioritise tasks and measure your progress towards completing these.

Microsoft To Do (iOS and Android) – helps you create, organise and manage 'To do' lists. The app synchs across your mobile devices and computer.

Microsoft OneNote (iOS and Android) – this app allows you to gather together thoughts, notes, documents, photographs and other media in a single place.

Evernote (iOS and Android) – create notebooks in which you can store and search all your ideas, photos, documents. Your notebooks can be accessed across all your computers and mobile devices.

(i) Find out more

For more for on setting smart goals and creating effective action plans, see the module **Getting ready for academic study**, or *The Study Skills Handbook,* pages 116–120.

Decide your approach

- Consider what you need to do to get yourself through the course.
- Do you need to spend more time studying alone or with others?
- Do you want to just complete the course – or excel at it – or somewhere in the middle?
- What do you need from others in your life, such as family and friends, so you can study the way you want and need?
- What do you need to do to manage yourself on this course?

Reflection: Managing myself for study

- What might get in the way of you completing this course as successfully as you would like?
- What actions could you take now to help ensure that you complete this course in a way that would satisfy you?

If these are not already included in your action plan, add them now.

(i) Find out more

For more on managing yourself effectively for study, see the module **Getting ready for academic study** and *The Study Skills Handbook*, Part 1.

Use your plan

- Use your plan to help you stay focussed on what you want to achieve.
- Use it to help pace your work throughout the course, so that you complete everything by the end date.
- Refer to your plan when you are starting on new assignments.
- Check your plan regularly to help stay on track. If it is too demanding, or not demanding enough, amend it to suit you better.

Sort the technology

Having good access to the internet, computer security and the right technology for your course makes all the difference to successful online learning. Most universities and colleges can provide information about what it is essential for you to purchase, what is desirable, and also what you don't need to buy.

Assume that there will be some glitches with whatever technologies you are using, from slow connections or computers crashing to apps not working as expected. These things happen so be prepared to take them in your stride and plan how you will manage them. To reduce unwanted stress and save yourself time in the long run, work in ways that are more likely to prevent unwanted problems.

Find out the equipment you need

- Does it matter which operating system you use (Microsoft or iOS/Apple)?
- How powerful a computer will you need?
- What broadband speed will you need?
- Which software will you be using on the course?
- Are any apps recommended?
- Will you need to print material? If so, do you need your own printer?

Clarify what is available

- Check whether any of the equipment or software you need is provided for free or at reduced costs through your institution.
- Check whether equipment is available for hire through your institution.
- Check whether training and support are provided to help you use technology.

Identify any shared resources

- Find out which communications tools are used on the course.
- Check whether shared spaces are provided to enable students to share documents, set up chat rooms, etc.
- Check whether there is a class Facebook page or equivalent.
- Check whether there is a class blog.
- Check whether any class discussion boards, chatrooms or forums have already been set up.

Familiarise yourself with course sites and tools

Online courses often make use of a wide range of online tools and resources. You might be asked to use video, voting software, podcasts, team-working tools, specialist search engines and repositories, social media, etc.

- Explore the course website. Know where to find different kinds of information you might need across the length of your course.

- Many courses use a virtual learning environment. Find out how this works and what is provided. Explore it until you can navigate it at speed.

- If you are required to take part in classes, discussions or other activities in real time, make sure well in advance that you are able to make the necessary connections.

- Check which search engines and repositories of resources are most useful for your course.

Need to improve basic IT skills?

Whilst some students have great technological know-how, many do not. If you feel you are not yet proficient with technology, there are resources that can help. For most courses, you will need to be comfortable using a computer or laptop and be able to type/word-process, use spreadsheets, databases, presentation software and apps.

- Don't worry if you are not yet comfortable using technology – it is likely you will pick up the necessary skills whilst on your course. Most require only a short introduction and some practice.

- Check what support is provided through your institution: many provide training in using the required technologies.

- Library staff at your institution can provide guidance on how to search for the best course-related material online.

- Check out whether IT courses are available through local libraries and community centres.

- There are free resources available online to help with basic IT skills.

(i) Find out more

- Computer basics: https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/topics/computers/

- Terminology: https://www.cybintsolutions.com/20-cyber-security-terms-that-you-should-know/

- Navigating the internet: https://www.digitalunite.com/technology-guides/using-internet/searching-browsing/ten-top-tips-using-internet

- Learn to touch type with a free online course: https://www.typingclub.com/ or https://www.typing.com/student/lessons or https://www.learntyping.org/

Manage the technology

- Plan your schedule so that you give yourself time to deal with glitches if and when they arise.

- Be selective in how many apps and tools you use. A few used effectively can be much more useful than juggling many that add minimal advantage.

- Don't assume all study is best using technology – sometimes a quick conversation or a sketch on paper can be faster and more effective. Hand-written notes are usually more effective than typed ones.

- Report any failures and glitches on systems used by the university or college if these have affected your ability to access part of the course or to complete an assignment.

Stay safe on the web

- Install anti-virus software and keep this up to date.
- Use a password that others are unlikely to guess- a mixture of numbers, letters and other characters.
- Use two-factor authentication to protect your emails.
- Create a different password for each account. Don't share your passwords with anyone else.
- Use screen locks on your phone, devices and laptop.

Find out more

To find out more about staying safe whilst working online, see:

- 5 tips for staying safe on the web: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_NDpps_rc0
- Securing your wi-fi set-up: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WHynHcXm7c
- 10 cyber-security tips: https://www.cybintsolutions.com/10-important-cyber-security-tips-users/

Safeguard your work

- Save your work frequently – so that you minimise the chances of losing any of it.
- Back up your work to cloud storage such as through Dropbox, Google Documents or shared space provided at your institution.
- Don't share assignments with others until the work of the whole class has been marked and returned. Eliminate the risk of anyone copying any of your work into their assignments as you could both be penalised for cheating.

Prevent aches and strains

- Find out about the best posture to use when typing, to avoid stiff shoulders, backaches and headaches.
- Change position often so that you don't put too much prolonged pressure on the same set of muscles.
- Use a wrist rest when typing for long periods.
- Keep your screen at eye level.
- Get up, walk around and stretch at least once every hour.

Find out more

For more detailed advice on taking care of yourself when working on-screen, see these useful sites.

https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/posture-tips-for-laptop-users/

https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-sit-correctly/

https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/hub/computer-health-and-safety/

Make effective use of recorded lectures

Many universities and colleges now provide 'lecture capture' – recording lectures when delivered to students in a lecture hall or, alternatively, in a media room or lab specifically for putting online. The quality of these can vary depending on the recording facilities; be open to focusing more on whether the content is original, useful and informative.

Why are recorded lectures provided?

- To supplement attendance at a lecture, rather than to replace it.
- To enable students to listen and absorb more during a lecture rather than having to make copious notes.
- To enable to enable students to go over lecture material they didn't understand.
- To help students revise materials, such as for clinical work or exams.
- To help students go over steps in a process before application, such as for studio, clinical or other practical tasks.
- As a safety net, to be available for students who were ill or couldn't attend a particular lecture.

The best way to use recorded lectures

1. **Use in a timely way.** Attend lectures when first provided, whether in person or online. Don't allow a backlog of unattended lectures to accumulate.

2. **Prepare first.** Before the lecture, read through any notes that were provided by the teaching staff and/or complete any activities they set. This helps the brain to organise information, comprehend new material and to spot key points during the lecture so it is more meaningful.

3. **Take some notes.** Ideally, take notes by hand rather than typing them, as this better engages the brain and assists recall.

4. **Focus on listening.** Whilst you are listening, make a note of times that your attention drifted or when you didn't catch or understand material. This will help you find recorded material more quickly when you go through it again.

5. **Read through your notes**. After the lecture, check that your notes make sense. If not, make a note of anything you need to listen for when listening to that lecture again.

6. **Discuss.** Talk about the lecture with one of more classmates, or describe it to an interested friend. This helps to engage the brain with the material and to identify points you might have misunderstood.

7. **Boost recall.** Play through parts of the recorded lecture within a day or two, whilst it is still fresh in your mind. For example, download it as a podcast and listen to it when out for a run or walk. This helps to boost recall. The longer you leave it, the less you recall.

8. **Fill gaps.** Listen out especially for material that you missed the first time around. Add this to your notes. Have a good textbook or two to hand, to help you fill the gaps.

9. **Be selective.** Listening to a full lecture takes time. Keep a note of which lectures or parts of the lecture will be best for particular purposes, such as for exam revision, using on placement, referring to in an assessment, to follow up as further reading, etc.

10. **Plan ahead.** Decide when will be the best time to listen to some or all of the lecture again, if at all. Mark this in your diary/planner, with a note about where to find the lecture and what to use it for.

Read through the following list and decide [√] which are relevant to you.

- ❑ Not attending lectures in person or virtually when others do, missing out on class interaction
- ❑ Building up a backlog of lectures that I haven't listened to in full
- ❑ Not making any notes during lectures, so I then have to listen to them again
- ❑ Making too many notes, so that I miss information whilst writing or don't follow the flow of the lecture
- ❑ Leaving large gaps in my notes, without coming back to these to fill them
- ❑ Not supplementing my lecture notes with notes from further reading
- ❑ Assuming I can't ask other students to help me make sense of a lecture
- ❑ Listening over and over to the same lectures, which takes up a lot of time
- ❑ Typing out the lectures almost in full rather than noting the most important points
- ❑ Not making much use of my notes

Take Action

If you checked [√] any of the boxes above, give some thought to the impact of these. Decide what you can and will do differently so that you get most value from all lectures, including virtual ones.

Focus effectively whilst studying

Whether studying in class or online, it is easy to let our attention wane and to become distracted by our thoughts, other people, our phones and devices, or anything that catches our eye. Whilst this can, of course, be entertaining, it means we miss out on information and on completing tasks at the right time. We then have to find more time to catch up, which can eat into our other plans.

Below are some ways that you can improve your concentration, so that study time is better focussed on what you need to do. Select [√] those that you consider would be useful for you.

Improve your concentration

- ❑ **Set goals for each study session.** Decide before you start what you want to accomplish. Be as specific as you can (e.g. Read 50 pages. Write 300 words. Write the Introduction.)
- ❑ **Attend to personal comfort.** Discomfort is distracting. Check your screen is at the right level, that your chair is comfortable, that the heating and lighting suit you, that you are not hungry or thirsty before you start.
- ❑ **Provide sufficient time.** Consider how much time you need to complete the task. Plan that into diary, so you don't feel rushed or overwhelmed by how much there is to do.

- ❑ **Identify the key points.** Whether reading, listening or watching, pause frequently to identify the most important points. Jot these down.

- ❑ **Question and challenge.** Jot down a set of questions to provide a focus when using learning materials. Check whether you find arguments compelling and evidence convincing. Apply your critical thinking abilities.

- ❑ **Remove obvious <u>distractions</u>.** You will know the kinds of things that tend to sabotage your best intentions. Make life easier for yourself by removing those from your study space.

- ❑ **Get friends onside.** If you know friends are likely to interrupt, ask them not to do so and explain why. Make it harder for them to distract you, such as by not telling them where you are and switching off your phone. Arrange suitable times when you can link up.

- ❑ **Switch tempo.** Be prepared to skip sections you already know, and to slow down when sections of online materials or recordings are harder to understand.

- ❑ **Vary tasks.** Changing tasks requires you to re-focus and reduces any <u>boredom</u> that might affect concentration.

- ❑ **Take breaks.** Set aside a few minutes every hour to stretch your legs, make a drink and refresh your energy.

- ❑ **Switch off.** Technologies such as phones, devices and even computer screens interrupt concentration and undermine the ability to develop sustained focus. For at least some study time, switch them off and use hard copy instead.

Helpful apps for studying more effectively

GoConqr (iOS and Android) – create slides, flashcards and mind maps from your notes. Allows you to collaborate with other students.

Zotero (iOS, Android and Windows) – helps you collect, share, organise and cite research

Mendeley (iOS, Android and Windows) – allows you to organise your research, annotate documents and cite research

MyStudyLife (iOS, Android and Windows) – synchs your timetable and exams across all devices. The app will give reminders.

Hold (iOS and Android) – block access to distractions such as social media and earn points for doing so. Points can be exchanged for a variety of rewards such as free cinema tickets or coffee.

ⓘ Find out more

For more about improving concentration, see *Mindfulness for Students*.

Making notes when studying online

It can be tempting, when everything is available online, to assume that you don't need any record of your own. Good note-making techniques are invaluable whichever way you study. Maintain a good set of notes when watching or listening to material online, just as you should for campus-based lectures and classes.

Making notes not only provides you with a permanent record, it assists the processes of thinking, learning, and remembering. It also makes it easier to manage the vast amount of information that you will encounter when studying online.

Select and summarise

- Manage information overload from the start. Be selective. Sift through the material, extracting what is most useful.
- Where platforms allow, tag useful posts so you can call them up easily.
- Tag selectively – to save time wading through information a second time.
- Draw out and summarise the best arguments and ideas from online discussions and record these in your own words.
- Don't take down more information than you think you might need.
- Don't duplicate material already noted in more or less the same way from a different source.

Pause to note

- When listening to or watching material online, focus primarily on listening so that you can absorb and understand better.
- When you feel there is a useful point to note, pause and jot it down or record it. This prevents you from missing important information inadvertently.
- Pause to think before you note and make the point in your own words. It will help you select the most relevant information.

Maintain academic integrity

- Don't just copy and paste threads, debates or other online material into your notes. If these ended up in your marked assignments later on, this could be picked up by tools that institutions use to check whether students are cheating.
- When studying online, maintain a good record of sources so that you can cite these fully and correctly in assignments.

Make sure you are familiar with the regulations at your institution for citing sources and listing references in assignments, as well as other rules surrounding plagiarism and cheating.

Useful apps for note-making

Office Lens (iOS, Android and Windows) – app allows you to take pictures of whiteboard content and convert it into slides or pdfs.

SimpleMind (iOS and Android) – app allows you to create and turn notes into mind-maps. You can also share your apps via a presentation mode.

Google Keep (iOS and Android) – create, store and colour code notes.

> ### (i) Find out more
>
> For more for on making good notes and citing sources, see the module **Reading and making notes**, or *The Study Skills Handbook*, pages 213–232.

Make effective use of time with teaching staff/supervisors

If time is available for tutorials, support or just for keeping in touch with teaching staff, make full use of it. It is your right – and it is usually to your advantage. You might need them to write references for you in the future, or to argue your case for awards or special circumstances, so it is good to ensure that they know who you are and your ambitions.

Take your space

- If offered appointments or time with your tutor or supervisor, take up the option.
- Respond promptly so that you are more likely to get a time that suits you.
- Don't be afraid to talk things through with teaching staff. They are there for you.
- If you would prefer to use a particular medium such as video call/conference, phone or email, ask if this is possible.

Keep to time

Treat time with your professors, lecturers or tutors as a precious resource. They have many demands on their time, so don't expect them to be able to re-schedule if you are late or not available.

- Be available punctually and ensure you are not dashing away at the end.
- Keep the time free: make sure it is marked clearly in your diary/planner.
- Let the teaching staff know well in advance if you need to change the time.
- If you miss the appointment for any reason, make contact with the tutor immediately. Let them know what happened and make another appointment straight away. The longer you leave it, the harder it can get to re-arrange.

Plan an agenda

- Make a full list of all the things it would be useful to discuss with your tutor.
- Arrange items on your list in order of priority. Raise the most important items first so that you don't run out of time to address these.
- If you are contacting your tutor by email or text, focus on just 2–3 points at most in each. This makes it easier to get a quick response on the most important issue, and prevents points from being lost in a forest of enquiries.
- Be prepared to update your tutor on any actions agreed last time you were in contact.
- If your circumstances or details have changed, let your tutor know.

Follow up on what is agreed

- Make notes of any actions that you or the tutor agree to undertake.
- Read through your notes after the meeting or connection ends.
- Use your diary to plan when you will undertake any actions you have agreed.

(i) Find out more

For more for on making best use of your course and its teaching staff, see *The Study Skills Handbook,* pages 29–46.

Make effective use of feedback

Feedback from others, whether tutors, students or employers, is invaluable. It provides you with alternative perspectives on how to view your own performance, enabling you to improve or adapt it if you wish. It is, of course, great to have positive feedback; it gives us a boost and can be motivating.

However, we usually gain even more from feedback that shows us how we can do things better, even if such feedback can seem negative and disappointing at first. Many courses encourage students to provide peer feedback, as well as providing feedback themselves through a number of formal and informal means.

Recognise when you are receiving feedback

- Much online feedback will not look like typical comments such as you would receive on assessments.
- Look out for feedback provided to the class or group as a whole. This usually contains useful guidance on how to approach tasks or tips on avoiding common errors.
- Feedback from tutors or peers might take the form of comments or likes. You can learn a lot from feedback such as this given to you or to others online. Notice what people like about both your own contributions and those of others.

Identify the point

- Be open to receiving feedback from others. Encourage it. Gain as much as you can so you achieve a rounded picture of your performance.
- Take notice of positive feedback. Recognise what you do already – and make sure you maintain such strengths.
- Assume positive intent. Even if you feel feedback is unfair, look for a way to make it work for you. You will be the one who benefits if you can use it to make improvements.
- If you don't understand what the feedback means, ask for further clarification.

Use it!

- Draw together all feedback together in one place, so that you can make use of it easily.

- Think about feedback you and others receive. What are its key messages? Is it fair? Is it useful?

- Re-phrase any comment that you consider negative into a suggestion of how you could do things better. Consider what the advantages would be to you if you were to make such improvements.

- Decide if, when and how you will make use of the feedback.

- Check back over feedback before starting and/or submitting your next piece of work.

Improve self-awareness

- Look for patterns or trends in the feedback: what points come up more than once?

- Consider what the feedback is telling you about yourself, both about strengths and areas you could improve further.

- If peer feedback seems unfair, you don't have to take it onboard. Discuss it if you think that would resolve misunderstandings.

- If tutor feedback seems unfair, ask to discuss this with them.

(i) Find out more

For more about using feedback effectively, see *The Study Skills Handbook*, pages 316–317.

For more about improving personal performance, see *Skills for Success*.

Studying collaboratively online

Your studies can benefit enormously through sharing ideas, gaining new perspectives and picking up information and tips. Engaging actively in a good online discussion or debate can stretch your brain and improves your own academic performance.

Many online courses provide facilities for interaction with others, either in class, between classes, or both. You could get together with students to set up your own groups and activities. Just being part of a group can help to increase the sense of being a part of something that matters and your accountability to others, making it more likely that you will keep going with the course.

Build relationships and networks

- Assume that there will be others who will find it useful to link up for mutual inspiration, support and encouragement.
- Regard other students as an important resource. Consider yourself as a potential resource or source of help to others.
- Introduce yourself. Let others know what interests and concerns you.
- Be part of more than one network or group – so you gain varied inputs.
- Use your networks. Set up one or more virtual study and support groups. Ask them for help and ideas when you need it.

Contribute to chats, forums and discussion boards

Do

- Participate. Initiate new discussions and contribute to discussion threads. Don't leave contributions to everyone else.
- Ask questions to advance the discussion. Think through for yourself what the answers might be.
- Aim to add something that hasn't already been said. Check first whether your question or comment has already been made.
- Keep it relevant. Check what has been asked and stay on topic.

- Make a single point with each contribution – so it is easy for others to respond to particular points.
- Ask open questions that encourage answers of more than 'yes' or 'no'. Consider the best way to phrase your question in order to obtain the most useful responses.
- Prepare what to say – so that your contribution is relevant and useful. Research your facts before posting them.

Don't

- Don't just 'fire off' responses without checking you have got the point.
- Don't dominate the discussion. Leave space for others to respond.
- Don't add too many posts (much more than others).
- Don't go off on tangents to the main topic.
- Don't use abbreviations, emojis, poor spelling or grammar on academic notice boards.

👁 Observation: How well do I participate?

From time to time, pause and take note of what kind of participant you are. Take a look at your contributions and decide whether you contribute your fair share.

- Do you tend more towards dominating activities and discussions, or to being more withdrawn – or a good mix?
- Do you tend more towards asking for help or giving it, or a good mix?

ⓘ Find out more

For more on using chat and discussion boards or for examples of how to write useful threads, see *Study Skills Connected.*

Set your boundaries

Do

- Work out for yourself what kind of contributions and engagement with others are realistic.
- Let others know what you can manage in terms of group contributions and turn-around time for communications – explaining the reasons.
- Find out what others need – and the boundaries that you and others need in place to make collaboration work.
- Negotiate how you might make a fair contribution if there are certain things you cannot do in the group.

- Consider setting ground-rules together with your group, about the kinds of ways everyone wants to work together. What would help the group or team work most effectively and harmoniously together?

Don't

- Don't expect others to cover your contribution to the group. Pull your weight, even if in different ways to others.
- Don't get drawn into being the sole support for students who are very needy: encourage them to use the formal support structures at your institution.
- Don't let others talk you into cheating or neglecting your studies.
- Don't accept bad behaviour from others.
- Don't assume you have to deal with everything yourself if things go wrong in groups. Bring them up for discussion in the group.

Protect yourself for collaborative study

Do

- Always produce your own assignments. Ensure these are all your own work. Write in your own words.
- Always cite and acknowledge in full the sources you use in your assignments, such as those used for ideas, concepts, information, quotes or images.
- Familiarise yourself with the rules for academic integrity at your college or university. Be aware of what constitutes cheating or plagiarism.
- Undertake only a fair proportion of the work required for group assignments.

Don't

- Don't share your best ideas and finished assignments with other students until after the teaching staff have marked all the assignments for your cohort. Sharing work can be regarded as cheating.
- Don't hand in anyone else's work as your own, even if you are part of the same group.
- Don't let anyone persuade you to purchase some, or all, of an assignment, to submit as your work.
- Don't take on excess work because others are not pulling their weight.

Maintain regular connection

Do	Don't
- Maintain contact with the course and others. It is easier to feel part of the course, to keep going and stay motivated if you connect up frequently, even for a short time.	- Don't lose contact with your course, tutor or group. If this happens for some reason, just send them a message to re-start the connection.
- Connect with different people for different purposes – to widen your networks and gain varied input.	- Don't overdo it! Don't bombard others with messages, questions and demands!
- Let others know if there is a reason why you might be out of contact for a while.	

Who is your 'person'?

It is useful to have at least one 'study buddy' that you maintain contact with on a regular basis. Depending on what you prefer, this could be someone on your course with whom you share tips or discuss course topics. Alternatively, it could be a student on another course to provide a broader perspective. It provides a relatively stress-free way of exchanging experiences and gaining insights into how others manage as a student. If you discuss course work, you can stimulate new ideas and ways of thinking about course material. It is also a way of building friendships and networks.

- Ask at least one other person to be a regular contact. Arrange to make contact for a given amount of time around once or twice a week.

- Agree on purpose: what do you both hope to gain from the time spent together? How do you both want to spend the time?

- Agree dates, start times and end times. Write these into your diary and make sure you keep them free of other commitments.

- Agree which media you will use to connect – or where you will meet if in person. Ideally, have at least one face to face meeting, whether in person or online, to help you get to know each other.

- Let the other person know what you appreciate about the connection. Show gratitude for the time offered.

Be part of effective groups

- Put time into getting to know each other. Allow time for the group to bond and learn to work well together.

- Find out the best times for everyone to be involved. Organise group activities at times that best fit these. It might be that all discussion needs to be asynchronous, if you are all free at different times.

- Be clear about the main purpose of the group. Help the group to stay focussed on that.

- Use the same approaches and courtesies you would if in a face to face group. Set ground-rules together. Agree roles that help the group function well.

- Allocate tasks fairly. Encourage people to play to their strengths and pursue interests, whilst ensuring everyone gets a chance to try out new skills within the group if they wish.

- Decide together which platforms and tools would be useful to your class or group – such as a course blog, wiki, Twitter account, social media, shared space for group notes and resources, chat room, etc.

(i) Find out more

For more about effective group work, see the module **Groupwork and presentations** and *The Study Skills Handbook,* chapter 8.

Wellbeing when studying online

You'll get more out of your studies and enjoy your experience of being a student more if you also feel happy and healthy. Whilst some stresses, pressures and disappointments are to be expected, it is possible to manage these so that they don't throw you entirely off course. It is important to maintain a reasonable balance between different aspects of life so that one does not come to dominate. It also helps to have people around who can keep matters in perspective. Students can do a great deal to help each other's wellbeing. A smile, a kind gesture or a few words of encouragement can go a long way.

Play your part

Help to make the online study environment a positive one for yourself and others.

~ Be respectful in your communications.

~ Use good netiquette.

~ Support and encourage other students.

~ Share your experience and tips.

Gain a sense of daily achievement

~ Give your morale a boost by recognising all the things you are achieving – don't just focus on what you have yet to do.

~ Set goals for each day. Check these off when completed, to help you register that you are getting things done.

~ Put aside some time each day just for you. Decide on at least one activity each day that you undertake just for enjoyment or relaxation.

Be kind to your mind

~ Restrict the amount of time you spend online looking at material that makes you anxious, whether this is about coronavirus or other topics.

~ Be active in searching out the type of news or information that makes you feel good.

- Don't stay connected to people who are rude, abusive or make you feel bad about yourself.
- Don't let yourself get drawn into negative interactions online.

Stay social

- Keep in <u>regular contact</u> with others – it is important to good mental health.
- Consider ways of <u>collaborating</u> with other students for study – or create social groups online.
- Show interest in other students; ask them how they are doing.
- Engage in some good quality chat. Catch up on news. Find out how others are coping.
- Talk about what is really going on for you: talking things through can help to keep things in perspective.

Maintain a healthy lifestyle

- Be aware of how to keep yourself generally fit and well when living on your own.
- Aim at a sensible balance of study, social life, time relaxing, and sleep.
- Eat a reasonably balanced diet – including protein, fruit, vegetables, fats and carbohydrates.
- Gain regular exercise that suits you, whether this is a sport, yoga, long walk or dancing in your room. It stimulates good brain function as well as helping with mental health.
- Be active in many small ways around your home – get up and move about for a few minutes at least once an hour.

There are lots of free exercise videos available on YouTube. Choose ones that suit your style.

(i) Find out more

Find out more about the basics of healthy eating and safe alcohol levels through *The Bloomsbury Student Planner.*

Establish a good sleep routine

Sleep plays a huge role not only in how effectively we can learn and what we remember, but also in our general health and sense of wellbeing. We benefit from having both a regular sleep routine and sufficient good quality sleep. Our time online can be disruptive of good sleep so care is needed in order to protect it.

- Aim at a regular sleep pattern – going to bed at around the same time each day.
- Give yourself enough sleep – typically at least 7 hours a night. Take cat naps if you need them during the day.

- Switch off all backlit devices at least one hour before bed, to help you fall asleep faster and to improve the quality of your sleep. Ideally, don't keep your phone in your bedroom.
- Avoid products that contain caffeine from late afternoon onwards.
- Power down for about an hour before bed. Stop work and relax.

Avoid 'burn-out'

- Be aware of how much time you spend on different kinds of online activities – and which could be taking up too much of your time or your emotional energy.
- Vary activities across the day, to keep your mind fresh.
- Take regular breaks during the day, week and term, so you can recharge. Build some 'downtime' into the day, so you can fully relax.
- Get away from your screen several times a day.

Manage stress

- Become more aware of what, for you, triggers a sense of being under too much pressure. This is different for everyone.
- Learn to recognise earlier the signs that you are feeling under pressure. Take a break, change activity, relax or ask for help at those times.
- Recognise that some stress is useful to us – sharpening our thinking and helping us to get things done.
- Much stress can be eased through good <u>time management</u>. Consider whether better time management could help you to reduce unwanted stress.
- Learn techniques that help manage stress, such as mindfulness, relaxation, yoga and/or breathing exercises.

Useful apps for promoting wellbeing

Headspace (iOS and Android) – build your mindfulness and meditation practice day by day with this app. Whilst you need a subscription to access many of this app's features, it is (at the time of writing) free for students and with certain premium apps, such as Spotify.

Mindfulness Bell (iOS and Android) – this app rings a 'mindfulness bell' at several points during the day. The sound of the bell is a prompt for you to stop and focus in on what you are doing at that point.

The Student Room (iOS and Android) – app version of the popular website allows you to connect with other students and access advise on a range of study and lifestyle topics.

(i) Find out more

For ideas on actions to take to help manage stress, see:
- *50 Ways to Manage Stress*
- *Mindfulness for Students*

Ask for help

If you find certain aspects of study or online learning are affecting your wellbeing, making you tired or anxious, speak to a student counsellor or member of teaching staff.

- Let your friends and classmates know what you need.
- Ask for help in good time as this means there will be more options for helpful solutions. Don't wait until matters build up or it is too late for some solutions to be put in place.
- Recognise that everyone needs help at times (even if some people appear not to). It is sensible to ask for help, support and encouragement when you need them.
- Find out what sources of help are available to you. Some useful links are provided below.

Sources of help and support

Need advice about your health? For non-emergency medical advice ring 111 or visit nhs.co.uk.

Feeling suicidal? Samaritans is a helpline for emotional distress and suicidal feelings. Call 116 123 for free 24/7 or visit samaritans.org.

Feeling depressed or anxious? For advice and support on student mental health, visit studentminds.org.uk.

Anxious about coronavirus?

Studentminds.org provides answers to frequently asked questions and a range of resources and support for students: https://www.studentminds.org.uk/coronavirus.html.

Reflection: Wellbeing

- Which aspects of your wellbeing are you best at maintaining whilst studying?
- Which aspects of your wellbeing do you tend to neglect?

Consider what you could do, or change, in order to take best care of your wellbeing.