



COMMUNICATIONS
TOOLKIT 4E

JANE GRELLIER & VERONICA GOERKE



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FOREWORD

In Australia's massified, if not now universal, higher education system, students enter our institutions with great diversity in academic preparedness, with varying social and cultural capital and with differing, often ill-formed, expectations of what is involved in tertiary study. In their first weeks and months, students report that they are frequently confounded by a lack of clarity regarding what is required for success. Many also find our institutional and academic language, not to mention discipline conventions, impenetrable. For too many commencing students, the transition to first year in higher education is an anxious journey from the known and familiar to the unknown and indecipherable.

Students' successful transitions into, through and out of higher education have been issues of concern and dedicated research in higher education nationally and internationally for decades. It is clear that the cost and impact of student departure are highest in the first year – for government, institutions, individuals, their communities and society at large, across a spectrum of reputational, ethical, personal, economic and legal dimensions. In Australia, the introduction of the demand driven system and targeted funding for access and widening participation by non-traditional cohorts have further underscored the imperative for our sector to be clear about what works for inclusive learning, success and retention, in the context of student heterogeneity as the new normal.

And that imperative is only sharpening. In 2015, the nation's regulatory and quality agency, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), was given a fresh mandate under the (then new) *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards)* to oversee higher education providers' performance on student attrition, retention and success. Specific standards have made the threshold requirements in this regard even clearer than was previously the case, most relevantly in this context the provisions of Clause 1.3 *Orientation and Progression*. HE providers are now held accountable for the delivery of strategies to support successful student transition, regardless of 'educational background, entry pathway, mode or place of study', by way of early needs assessment, good learning and teaching, quality curriculum design, the timely provision of support services and monitoring for unsatisfactory progress.

In 2017, the stakes got higher again. Consequent on the government's proposed introduction of a 7.5 per cent performance-based element to the Commonwealth Grant Scheme, the release in June of both the TEQSA Report on first year attrition¹ and the Higher Education Standards Panel's Discussion Paper on improving retention, completion and success in higher education² have once again (re)focused sector attention.

In this context, an important part of equitably unpacking for all students the culture of higher education and its disciplines is to be explicit about the expectations of tertiary

¹ Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. 2017. 'Characteristics of Australian Higher Education Providers and Their Relation to First-year Student Attrition.' Melbourne: Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

² Higher Education Standards Panel. 2017. 'Improving Retention, Completion and Success in Higher Education: HESP Discussion Paper.' Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

study and the criteria for successful engagement with it. Given the foreseeability of transition hurdles, there is an onus on us to articulate, clearly and consistently, not only the explicit but also the hidden rules, expectations and behaviours fundamental to learning engagement and success. If we expect first-year students to become independent and self-managing learners, they must be supported in their early development and acquisition of the tools they need – transferable academic skills – to engage productively with the learning and assessment tasks we design for them. Mastery of these basic enabling skills is foundational for later years' learning success in all disciplines and for future learning. Essentially also, their attainment presages the acquisition of key graduate attributes, outcomes which TEQSA requires HE providers to evidence and the employability skills that are demanded of graduates on entry into the workplace.

This book makes clear for all students, whatever their background or prior learning, the substance of the academic skills in which they must be proficient. It does so comprehensively and accessibly, in a manner that is direct, inclusive, motivational and student-friendly. The practical advice, tips and strategies that are presented provide novice learners with the opportunity to acquire the threshold skills and literacies many degree programs assume already exist. In this way, the book makes explicit many of the hidden curriculum's rules and expectations, while also surfacing the potential for disciplinary difference. Critically for first-year success, the authors acknowledge early the importance of the social context of learning and seek to normalise the predictable anxiety many new learners will encounter over the course of their early engagement with the student life cycle.

But students are only one half of the equation for effective transition pedagogy. Many higher education teachers also require assistance to unpack and scaffold the acquisition of these foundational skills for diverse cohorts; assistance which is not predicated on a deficit view of entering student ability. This is another great value of this text – the ways and means for empowering student learning are made explicit for both students and their teachers. To have maximum impact on student success, substantive references to this book should be embedded in core first-year curricula – in lectures and tutorials, in program materials, in reading lists, in eLearning and the like – as a basis for discussing these enablers with students in ways that are contextualised to the discipline. The research in this regard is clear: to be most effective, language and learning skills' development should be integrated into the curriculum and context of discipline learning – their acquisition cannot be left to chance.

I commend the authors on the obvious care, expertise and respect for students and their learning they have brought to this task. The book is a valuable contribution to the effective deployment of transition pedagogy and should be harnessed in aid of intentional first-year curriculum design. I recommend this book as an invaluable learning support for diverse first-year student cohorts and for those who seek to engage with them for learning success. Both students and teachers will be grateful for the learning it facilitates.

Professor Sally Kift PFHEA
President, Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows
ALTF Senior Fellow, Discipline Scholar: Law
James Cook University
August 2017

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr Jane Grellier is a coordinator in the first-year Communications Program in the Faculty of Media, Society and Culture at Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia. She works with a team of teachers who provide communications units to more than 3000 first-year students each year across various internal faculties, as well as online and offshore. Jane worked initially as a secondary English teacher in Western Australian schools, and then spent 15 years as an educational writer and curriculum developer for a range of secondary and tertiary education sectors. She has a strong commitment to teaching writing, especially to encouraging students to write in clear and concise English, which she sees as essential in the university setting. Jane's own research currently focuses on reflective practice – both in her own writing and in developing reflective thinking among first-year students.

Veronica Goerke is a professional learning consultant at Curtin University's Bentley campus in Wadjuk Nyungar Country. She first worked in education as a secondary-school teacher, and then coordinated and taught first-year university communications units; she then moved to curriculum design, and is now focused primarily on staff professional learning. Veronica works in partnership with staff members so they can model the inclusive communication practices that Curtin University expects of its students. Her research focus is on the place of formal reconciliation in Australian universities.

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Many of our colleagues at Curtin University have continued to be supportive and generous with their time and ideas as we have been working on this fourth edition. In particular, we would like to thank fellow Curtin University staff members who have given us invaluable feedback that has enriched and sharpened this edition. A special note of appreciation goes to Katie Dunworth and Carmela Briguglio, who are international leaders in research into English-language proficiency and what this means in the Australian higher-education sector. Veronica has been privileged to have had their direction and guidance on the text, as well as their assistance while working on university strategies to support academic communication development among students. Veronica again acknowledges Anne Harris for her commitment, supportive conversation and expertise in this field. This fourth edition acknowledges the contribution of senior Wadjuck, Simon Forrest, the Elder in Residence at Curtin University.

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Jane would like to thank her husband Warren for his continuing support through this writing process. Their shared passion for teaching and for language lies at the heart of all her work, and their teaching experiences together over the past two years have kept her

grounded and enthusiastic. She would also like to thank teacher, friend and co-learner Joy Scott, who challenges, supports and laughs along with her.

Veronica thanks her husband, Mark, who remains delightfully pedantic about the written and spoken word! She also adds a note of appreciation for her children, Damien, Alannah and Megan, who, with their friends, continue to show her that communication is dynamic and multi-dimensional – especially as they chat with her using one of the many communication apps like Messenger and WhatsApp, along with Bitmoji and Snapchat. However, they probably don't 'Zoom', WebEx or Spark as much as she does. (Veronica notes that all these communication tools may have been superseded by the time this edition is published!)

To the staff at Cengage Learning, especially Fiona Hammond, Jacqueline Flynn, Carly Slater, Sutha Surenddar, Vicki Stegink and Duncan Campbell-Avenell, who have supported us in this venture 'fourth time around', we say thank you for your patience and helpful encouragement.

Veronica also acknowledges the teachers who have used the text with their students. The original book was written as a toolkit not only for students but also for their teachers, and we hope this revised edition continues to assist educators to support their students' learning.

The authors and Cengage Learning would also like to thank the following reviewers for their incisive and helpful feedback:

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- Andy Brown, University of Tasmania
- Amanda Muller, Flinders University.

BEFORE YOU READ THIS BOOK

Students, past and present, are the characters in this book. They come from Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia; Open Universities Australia, and Miri, Sarawak; Notre Dame University, Fremantle; Edith Cowan University; and the University of Western Australia. They are enrolled in a wide range of courses, including fine arts, design, social sciences, commerce, health sciences, science, law, engineering, nursing, computer science, geology, spatial sciences, architecture, planning, construction management, cultural studies, journalism, screen arts and education courses. Most are first-year students, taking a unit that focuses on the learning processes they will need for university study – in research, academic writing, teamwork and oral presentations. These students have provided models for this book, and stories of effective (and not-so-effective) academic practice.

Our experience teaching and coordinating units for such students has played a major part in shaping this book:

- We have chosen to write informally throughout the book, addressing you, the current student, directly, and speaking personally about our own experience.
- We address both individual students and those working in seminar or workshop groups, and provide activities for both types of student throughout the book.
- We also emphasise some of the language processes you will need in your future professional careers in order to communicate successfully with clients, employers and colleagues. You can't start to develop these processes too soon!
- The book is applicable to all undergraduate courses at university, particularly to first-year students in these courses. You will be able to apply our advice and models to whatever discipline you are studying.
- The book will be useful for any student studying at a tertiary or a secondary level. Developing academic communications is a major educational focus in the twenty-first century, and the book is our contribution to this.

Although the book focuses on language development, we want to emphasise that education, both tertiary and secondary, is about much more than this. We like this quote from Allan Luke, Professor of Education at Queensland University of Technology, from his public address at the Brisbane Ideas Festival on 30 March 2006:

“ Although they always have and will continue to serve the national economic interest, universities must remain seedbeds for basic intellectual work, for speculative theory and experimental practice. They must perpetually strive to become more open environments where students are encouraged to engage with historical, scientific and narrative knowledge, to debate these matters freely and speculatively, and to apply these understandings to the complex worlds of new economies, new technologies and new cultures. ”

Professor Allan Luke (2006). Address to Brisbane Ideas Festival

This quote sums up our approach to education. While we focus in this book on helping you develop the processes you will need to be successful students, we believe that these processes are means rather than ends in themselves. If you learn well to think, research, write, reflect, work collaboratively and make oral presentations, then you can benefit from the 'seedbeds' and 'open environments' that are universities, and you can play your part in making them such rich places. We wish you joy of your studies, and hope that this book will enhance them.

Guide to the text

As you read this text, you will find a number of features in every chapter to enhance your study of communication and help you understand how the theory is applied in the real world.

CHAPTER OPENING FEATURES

9

ACADEMIC ESSAY WRITING

CONTENTS

- The academic essay
 - + The analytical essay
 - + The argumentative essay
- Early research
 - + Primary research
- Developing your argument
 - + The thesis statement
 - + The concessive argument

Identify the key concepts that the chapter will cover with the **Chapter outline** at the start of each chapter.

FEATURES WITHIN CHAPTERS

Student reflection 713

Reflective writing can begin your thinking processes

Many issues attracted my attention in this lecture about suburbia and the Great Australian Dream. Perth suburbia to me is ideal when you consider the lifestyles available. This made me begin to wonder what the ideal lifestyle is to the average person. Does a backyard that is big enough to fit another family home really satisfy our lifestyle needs? I considered my own lifestyle where we as a family rarely use the considerably large yard, with the exception of family events such as birthday parties, barbeques and other social gatherings. Lifestyle rarely requires the use of such space, but nevertheless I would never wish to lose it. The lecture made me realise that the majority of Australians share my attitude and drew my attention to what I believe is a misconception that people who think this way are selfish.

While Perth's suburbia is extremely extensive, so is our available geographical area. So why is it that more and more planners are pushing for higher density residential development in the close perimeter areas around the city? This question troubled me at first as I could not think why it is that people would choose to live in such places. It then occurred to me that not everyone opts for the lifestyle that I value.

Chris Lodge, urban and regional planning student

Read authentic **Student Reflection** examples of real student communication efforts that illustrate theory in practice. These come from students across a wide range of disciplines.

Scientists, past and present, who have taken a public stand on a particular issue have often been attacked by members of the public who disagree with their point of view. Ultimately, some people also tend to question the motives of the scientist, citing the fact that some scientists may be outspoken in order to receive the government research grants that are so desperately required. But, as Mark Floyd [1999] notes in a story about Professor Mary Jo Nye, Horning Professor of Humanities at Oregon State University, 'if scientists do not become involved in public policy debates, the result can be a decision-making process involving complex, critical issues that are not fully understood'. Ultimately, it was, and currently is, with the assistance of scientists that humanity, as a species, is able to unlock the secrets of the physical and the natural universe. A historical overview of scientific philosophy will result in an acceptance by the reader that without the intervention of men and women of science in controversial public issues, breakthroughs that have the potential to erase common ideologies will become scarce.

Daniel Frewer, engineering student

Explore **Annotated examples** of real communication that highlight good practice and room for improvement. Further examples of student presentations are included online in the CourseMate Express website.

Activity 9.3: Writing your introduction



As an individual or with another student

Write the introduction to your essay, following the instructions and model described above. (If working with another student, discuss how you will approach your writing and write each introduction together, if desired; but be careful not to finish with similar introductions for your two essays.)

In a class or group

Pin up introductions and critique them for each other. Consider how each critique informs your own introduction, and make changes as necessary.

Test your understanding as you go via the **Activity boxes** which include questions to help you review, integrate, and comprehend information. Answers to selected activities can be found online in the CourseMate Express website.



How to spot and fix common redundant phrases

How to spot sentence fragments	How to fix sentence fragments
Global warming has been proved to be increasing throughout the world today. Despite the doubts of a few global sceptics. (No verb)	<i>Connect the fragment to the preceding sentence with a comma.</i> Global warming has been proved to be increasing throughout the world today, despite the doubts of a few global sceptics.
The Australian film industry has not been strong in recent years. Not since the Labor government economic support of the seventies. (No verb)	<i>Connect the fragment to the preceding sentence with a comma.</i> The Australian film industry has not been strong in recent years, since the Labor government economic support of the seventies.
Sustainable architecture is an essential part of all university architecture courses. Being the most important subject for training socially responsible architects. (No finite verb)	<i>Rephrase the sentence fragment (and often also the one before) to fit the situation.</i> Sustainable architecture is an essential part of all university architecture courses, since it is considered the most important subject for training socially responsible architects.

Learn How to identify the most common mistakes and errors students make and how to address or improve on them through the **How to spot and fix tables**.

Don't let research get in the way of writing

Be careful if you're one of those people who overloads on research so much that you can't get down to writing. The amount of research you do needs to be proportionate to the size of your assignment task. Some people suggest you should spend about one-third of the time you have allotted to an assignment on research, and the remaining two-thirds on writing, editing and proofreading your work.

HINT

Hint boxes in each chapter give you simple tips and suggestions for more effective communication.

ICONS



Explore the online resources by following the **NEW CourseMate Express** margin icons throughout the text and at the end of chapter. Find answers, activities and more.

END-OF-CHAPTER FEATURES

At the end of each chapter you will find several tools to help you to review, practise and extend your knowledge.

Revision activity: Revise these ideas

- 1 Scholarly reading at university is often very different from the reading you have done in your previous education. You need to read actively – that is, adapt your reading strategies to suit your purpose.
- 2 Some scholarly texts are very complex and, as a first-year student, you need specific strategies to help you make meaning from them.
- 3 Active listening involves deliberately engaging yourself in the lecture you are listening to in order to avoid being just a passive recipient of information.
- 4 Mind-mapping is a particularly valuable active-listening technique; you may find it particularly useful throughout the rest of your studies.

Thinking activity: Critical and reflective questions

- 1 What study approaches and techniques have worked well for me in the past? Do I need to adapt them so that they will suit university study?
- 2 What mistakes and misunderstandings have I experienced in the past that have harmed my results? How can I organise my studies this year in such a way as to start overcoming these problems?
- 3 Could I benefit from discussing ideas and studying with a small group of other students? How might I help organise an informal study group so that it runs successfully?

Useful websites

The following online resources provide further useful information about essay writing:

Australian National University Academic Skills and Learning Centre: 'Essay Writing': <http://www.anu.edu.au/students/learning-development/writing-assessment/essay-writing>.

University of Sydney Learning Centre: 'Planning your Essay': <http://writesite.elearn.usyd.edu.au/m3/m3u1/index.htm>.

University of New South Wales Learning Centre: 'Essay and Assignment Writing': <https://student.unsw.edu.au/essay-and-assignment-writing>.

Purdue University (US) Online Writing Lab (OWL): 'Academic writing': <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/2/>.

References

Floyd, Mark. 1999. 'Should Scientists Become Players in Public Policy Debate?' *Oregon State University News and Research Communications*, 25 January. <http://oregonstate.edu/ua/nrcs/archives/1999/jan/should-scientists-become-players-public-policy-debate>.

Kartinyeri, Doreen and Sue Anderson. 2008. *Doreen Kartinyeri: My Ngarrindjeri Calling*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press: 2.

Review your understanding of the key chapter topics with the **Revision Activities**.

Process and apply content to current issues or personal experience using the critical and reflective **Thinking activities**.

Use the **Useful websites** to extend your understanding and explore online resources.

Extend your understanding through the suggested **References** relevant to each chapter.

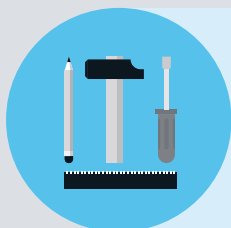
Guide to the online resources

FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

Cengage Learning is pleased to provide you with a selection of resources that will help you prepare your lectures and assessments. These teaching tools are accessible via cengage.com.au/instructors for Australia or cengage.co.nz/instructors for New Zealand.

NEW COURSEMATE EXPRESS

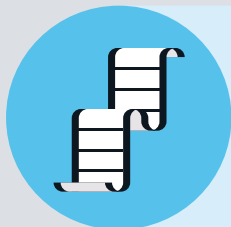
CourseMate Express is your one-stop shop for learning tools and activities that help students succeed. As they read and study the chapters, students can access student communication examples and checklists as well as check their understanding of the chapter with interactive quizzing. CourseMate Express also features the Engagement Tracker, a first-of-its-kind tool that monitors student engagement in the content. Ask your Learning Consultant for more details.



INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL

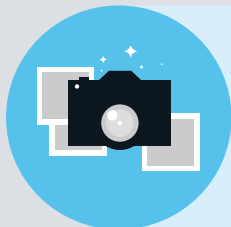
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- activity solutions
- suggested activities
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- Activities
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- Writing checklists
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PART

1

TRANSITIONING TO TERTIARY STUDIES

Over the past few decades, the digital revolution has caused disruption in how tertiary institutions create and deliver education. These institutions have been working hard to transform how they help you learn skills to enhance how innovative, entrepreneurial and collaborative you will be in solving real-world problems. This approach is supported by industry and governments across the globe that are 'prioritizing education reforms that emphasize more 21st century practices' (Adams Becker et al. 2017, 12). Every tertiary institution is committed to helping you stay and succeed in whatever you have chosen to study with them, and so they make big investments to help you have a smooth transition. As Professor Sally Kift has stated, 'it is clear that first year students face unique challenges as they make very individual transitions to study; particularly academically and socially, but also culturally, administratively and environmentally' (2015, 53). In Australia, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) monitors the standards of these higher-education institutions to ensure you receive a quality learning experience. The first Part of our text should help you get off to a good start.

Part 1 will be useful if you are beginning your higher-education studies – whether you are a recent school-leaver or are returning to study after doing other things. Many of you will make a smooth transition to tertiary studies, adapting to new expectations and approaches to learning; some of you, however, will experience challenges. You may have difficulties organising yourself, adjusting to the course you have chosen or developing the particular communication skills required for success at this level.

You may be an older student (i.e. who has not come straight from school) who hasn't done extended writing for 20 years and may feel overwhelmed by the apparent expectations around digital literacy. Or you might be a student who is very confident with mathematics, but not so sure of your oral-presentation skills. You may even be the first person in your family to enrol in higher education. Whoever you are, this section Part contains hints that will be useful for you.

Part 1 has two chapters. The first introduces you to some key aspects of life in higher education, while the second outlines some reading, note-making and exam-preparation skills that you may find beneficial. If you already feel confident in both of these areas, go straight to Part 2.

1: Making the transition

2: Developing effective study skills



MAKING THE TRANSITION

CONTENTS

- **Your first months as a tertiary student**
 - + Studying fully online
 - + Connecting with peers
 - + Connecting with faculty
 - + The online learning environment
 - + The library
 - + Academic learning support
 - + Course and unit/subject outlines
 - + Calendars and study plans
 - + Overview of the semester
 - + Class formats – virtual and physical
 - + Study groups
- **Respecting diversity**
- **Mature-aged students**
- **English-language proficiency**
- **New international students**
- **Communicating with members of staff**
 - + Formal emails
- **Challenges you might face**
 - + Dissatisfaction with assessment results
 - + Falling behind in your studies
 - + Course too difficult or motivation low

“Surviving university is actually a great experience! Nearing to the end of my degree, I now realise and value the time and effort I put in since first-year. I got through uni by setting little goals for myself each semester regarding achievement of learning outcomes and assignments. It’s important to remember that you are responsible for your own learning. Draw upon what motivates you to complete tasks – think of your life in a bigger picture.”

Rebecca Chang, health sciences student

Throughout this chapter, the CourseMate Express icon indicates an opportunity for online self-study, linking you to activities and other online resources.



Your first months as a tertiary student

Whether you are a recent school-leaver or someone returning to study after a break of several years, and whether you have chosen to study mostly by attending classes on a physical campus or completely online, it is important that you develop a toolkit of strategies to help you survive – and, indeed, thrive – as a tertiary student. So, before you get into the chapters on communication skills, read through this chapter for some ideas you may find useful during those first months of study.

Studying fully online

Today, more and more students are studying fully online, sometimes from overseas but generally from within Australia. If you are beginning to study in the online mode, be prepared to be patient with yourself, and to take some time to develop sound study routines.

Your first task is to find your way around the *learning management system* (or LMS) through which your unit is run. Don't be daunted by this – if you were attending a tertiary campus for the first time you would probably get lost frequently over the first few weeks, and would certainly need some time to become familiar with the resources available to you. Online learning is no different, and you need to do what you can to become familiar with your environment:

- Read the 'welcome packs', introductory information and study guides you are sent, and then re-read them. View any introductory videos.
- Click on all the links in your unit website so that you become familiar with it as quickly as possible. Don't worry about 'breaking' anything – you can't do any harm by clicking on links.
- Search for your unit program or calendar, which lists due dates for assignments. (This will usually be in your unit outline.) Download it to your own computer, and consider printing a copy for your study desk.
- If your unit includes a discussion board or other means of communicating with your tutor and fellow students, introduce yourself to them early on. We find that those students who leave this until after the first week often feel awkward 'arriving late', and so have problems participating.
- You will know best how to organise yourself. Plenty of advice is available online about how to ensure you organise your life appropriately to complete your online study, but only you know what will work for you.

Here are some helpful websites to guide you as an online student:

- Online Study Australia – 'Are you a good online student?': <https://onlinestudyaustralia.com/are-you-a-good-online-student/>.
- Online College – 'Ten traits of a successful online learner': <http://www.onlinecollege.org/2011/07/14/10-traits-of-a-successful-online-learner/>.
- Southern Nazarene University – 'Online learning habits': <https://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/habits.htm>.

Our last piece of advice should possibly have come at the beginning; but, after thinking through some of the above advice, you may now be in a better position to receive it. Think again about your commitment to online study and, more importantly, about how much you will be able to undertake. Online study is not a method of ‘rushing through’ a course while applying less effort than in face-to-face learning. In fact, it will often be more time-consuming than on-campus study, and it can be more difficult to maintain your commitment to study when you are working alone. Its value is that it allows you to be flexible in time and space; but it will still make large demands on your time.

At least at the beginning of your online studies, do not overload yourself with many units. Take your time, be patient with yourself and focus on developing good online study habits.

Connecting with peers

Whether you generally prefer working alone or in big groups, the first thing we advise you to do, whether in online or face-to-face contexts, is to make friends. Connecting with people should be easy in the early weeks, since a number of activities will be set up that encourage you to introduce yourself. (This applies to online as well as on-campus learning.) Take any such opportunities given to you by lecturers and get to know other students. Do not rely only on social media, but quickly access the online meeting spaces provided within your courses and become an active participant as soon as possible. This will enable you not only to get to know your peers but also to see who you might prefer to work with (i.e. on group assignments). Whether or not you get involved in extracurricular activities, you can easily and naturally make links with peers within your course. In your course, you will meet people who have chosen the same subjects as you, and with whom you therefore already have something in common. Don't wait until it's too late, like the students in one university study (Case 2007) who realised in their third year that they had missed out by only getting to know one or two people in their first year. Make use of opportunities to work in groups (see Chapter 15 for specific advice on this), since this should help you make friends more quickly, and thus feel supported as you study.

Connecting with faculty

Get to know your faculty or department quickly. Know the answers to the following questions:

- Who are my lecturers and how do I contact them?
- Where is the main office for my faculty or department?
- Where is the key information about my course located on the website and in the LMS?
- How do I submit assignments?
- Does my area have a special room or online space for first-year students?

If you don't yet know these details even though you have been studying for a while, don't be afraid to go and find out about them now. After all, you're likely to be studying within the same area for at least three years.

The online learning environment

As we mentioned earlier, most tertiary institutions use a learning management system (or LMS), such as Blackboard, Moodle or Canvas, to organise their learning material. However comfortable you are in the online environment, make some time to explore the LMS at the institution where you are now studying and to see how your lecturers have used it for their subjects. If everything is new to you, look for help online, attend sessions organised by the library and ask other students for help. Explore your LMS before classes start to ensure you won't miss out on crucial information.

Another reason for becoming familiar with, and regularly using, the LMS is that this is likely the place where you will be required to submit assignments. Even if you do not submit all your assignments through the LMS, assessment requirements and grading processes are likely to be outlined and recorded in this environment.

The library

More than ever before, higher-education libraries are the places to go to learn all you need to know about succeeding in tertiary environments. As a tertiary student, you will need to use more than just general websites for your research; lecturers will generally expect you to use a range of sources, including discipline-specific e-journals, which can often only be accessed via the library. Don't forget the librarians themselves, because they are usually at the forefront of digital technology, making them invaluable when you are conducting secondary research at this level. (See Chapter 3 for further details.) As well as speaking directly to the librarians, you can also communicate with them online. Whatever resources are available at your institution's library, access and use them.

Thus, as soon as you are enrolled, whether you're studying on campus or online, you should do a tour of your library's website so that you will know what the library can offer you.

Academic learning support

If you are having difficulties with any aspects of your studies, the best place to go for help, in the first instance, is your institution's main website. Most, if not all, tertiary institutions have highly visible links from their homepage to webpages where you will find either answers to your questions or directions about where to go to find those answers. These websites are 'one-stop shops' for students, and we encourage you to explore them as soon as you can so you know what your institution can offer you.

In addition to online support, every campus will have places where students can go to get free assistance with their studies. This may include help with essay writing, academic study skills seminars and assistance with English-language proficiency. Explore what is available so that when you need some help, you will know where to get it. Most tertiary institutions house this information ‘one click away’ from the homepage, such as at Swinburne University (<http://www.swinburne.edu.au/student/study-help/las.html>) and at Queensland University of Technology (see the ‘Cite/Write’ link at <https://www.student.qut.edu.au/>). If you’re having problems, especially in areas such as organising your life or writing your assignments, go and ask for help. It is there!

If you are an Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student – and especially if you are from a remote community – you may choose to seek out the areas of your campus that are especially for Indigenous Australian students. Search the website and you will find information such as Nura Gili at the University of New South Wales (see <https://student.unsw.edu.au/additional-support>).

Whoever you are, you should find out what your institution can offer you.

Course and unit/subject outlines

The way in which programs and parts of programs are named differs across tertiary institutions. In this book, we will use the word ‘course’ to describe a full program lasting three or more years (e.g. Medical Imaging, Psychology) and ‘unit’ or ‘subject’ for one subject within that course, lasting a semester or perhaps a year.

Read your course and unit outlines as soon as you receive them. The unit outline contains essential information about the unit, such as learning outcomes, assessment details and the topics for each class. Make time to check every outline carefully – especially before you start assignments – because your success will depend on knowing exactly what you are required to do.

Calendars and study plans

Use an online calendar to organise how and when you will study. Create a study plan as soon as possible, and refer to the official *academic calendar* (available through the website of your place of study) as you do this. You can then make a weekly study plan, as well as a semester study plan. Set up calendar alerts to remind you of key dates. Place all your deadlines in your calendar, as well as weekly times to prepare for classes and then to review after each class. Set aside time in Week 3 or 4 of semester to reassess your study plan to see if it is realistic, and reorganise if you need to.

Check your study timetable and work commitments, as well as the demands of ‘the rest’ of your life, and get organised about how you want to live it. If you don’t have a plan, you will be more likely to fall behind in your work and get stressed. Making your plan public, at least to the important people in your life, is also a good idea, so that they will support you rather than sabotage your plans.

The key dates in your study plan will be the assessment due dates. It is likely that several assessments will be due around the same time, but you are expected to start

working on them well in advance. You won't be able to complete them all in the week they're due. Even if you were a person who could start and finish an assignment in one night at secondary school, you will not be able to do this with tertiary-level studies.

When you prepare your study plan in the first week of semester, indicate the blocks of time that you will spend on each assignment. If the assignments are all due in Week 12, setting aside only Week 11 to work on them is risky. Here are some tips to help you:

- Talk to your peers about how they organise their homework and study time (but ignore people who say they don't do any work and 'wing it' the night before). See the section later in this chapter about the value of study groups.
- If you need to submit a hard copy of your assignment, don't leave the printing until 'the night before'. There may be problems – e.g. with a printer breaking down – so organise your printing well in advance of the due date.
- If everything gets too much and you are behind on an assignment, speak to the relevant lecturer (in person or by email) as soon as possible. If possible, it's a good idea to indicate what you have completed so far and how much more you plan to do.
- You may need a short extension on the submission date. Remember that you usually need to apply for this *before* the assignment is due. Check your unit outline for the rules about extensions. Some of our students leave it until it's too late to apply for an extension, and then they might have marks deducted for making a late submission.
- Another option is to use your institution's academic learning support services or visit its counselling service. Counsellors are not just there to assist you when life is difficult; they are there for students who simply get tired, stressed or disorganised. So don't forget to check out the relevant information on your institution's website.

Whatever you decide to do, *do something*. Your lecturers can't read your mind and, even if you don't believe you have a valid excuse, if you are not coping and are having difficulty meeting an assessment deadline, speak to someone about it.

Overview of the semester

Though all institutions and courses vary in how and when they conduct their first year, they all follow similar processes. The following sections provide a summary of what is likely to happen during your first semester or trimester.

Orientation Week

For most tertiary institutions, Orientation Week (or 'O Week') is the time when students are introduced to their study environment and, more specifically, to their course. You will be introduced to key staff members, receive information about your course and be expected to familiarise yourself with the campus or online environment. You will confirm your class timetable, check course and unit/subject information online, explore on-campus (or online) classrooms and create a study plan.

It's normal to experience information overload during this time. However, you'll soon start to feel familiar and more at ease.

HINT

Participate in Orientation Week!

Lots of fun things happening during 'O Week', but this is also the time for course introductions. Attend these sessions, because if you don't, it will be like missing the beginning of a movie; you can catch up, but you will need to put in extra effort to do so. If you do miss a session, be proactive: communicate with your unit coordinator and peers to find out what you need to know.

Early weeks of semester

The first two to three weeks of a course will often seem easy, since little may be expected of you and you will be given plenty of information (often too much!). This will include information about assessment requirements.

HINT

Hint from a recent graduate

“Completing assignments and fulfilling the obligations of your degree well before the due dates will grant you the gift of ultimate freedom to experience the joys of university, like friends, partying, sports and other events, to their fullest potential.”

Hursh Dodhia-Shah, Bachelor of Commerce graduate

The last day for *enrolling* in a new unit/subject to your course is usually within the first week of semester. You may be overwhelmed with expectations and information, but if you are starting to feel unsure about your current course and you think you may want to study something else, get advice now before the deadline.

The last day for *withdrawing* from a unit/subject without paying fees often occurs within the first weeks of semester. If you are not sure whether you want to study all the subjects you are enrolled in, get advice before this payment deadline. You may need to withdraw from one unit or get help to create a viable study plan.

If you're having problems understanding the assessments in your course, ask lecturers for help and use websites such as those named throughout this chapter.

Tuition-free weeks

Throughout the academic year, every institution will have breaks from course delivery – but not from learning. During these tuition-free weeks, use your time away from class contact wisely by catching up on assessments and study notes.

Lecturers will be available during these periods, but their contact times may be more restricted than in other weeks, so check their availability in advance.

Later weeks of semester

In the final weeks of semester, course delivery continues and more assessments are due. You should work consistently on assignments during this time. Remember that, although major assignments are often due late in the semester, you should start working on them early so that you won't feel overwhelmed in the last weeks.

Maintain your class attendance and regular study. Contact with your peers and lecturer is invaluable to your learning experience, so make a consistent effort to attend classes.

Lecturers often give advice about exams in the last weeks of semester, so you can't afford to miss these classes! (In our experience, students sometimes fail exams because they don't know the exam requirements, such as instructions about materials they need to take into the exam rooms.)

Study break

In the period in between the end of scheduled classes and the start of exams, there is a block of time, often called 'Study Week', during which you will have time to study for your exams.

Lecturers are available for help during this time. Contact them if you're feeling desperate or if you need to clarify any last-minute issues.

Examination weeks

It's your responsibility to check when and where your exams are to be held. Be careful to check the final timetable on your institution's website. Don't rely on the draft timetable, as details can change.

See the section on preparing for exams in Chapter 2.

If you cannot attend an exam because of illness or another major crisis, contact your lecturer or your institution's counselling services *before* the exam. They will help you resolve your issue.

If you have attended an exam but have major concerns about your performance (e.g. your car broke down on the way, and so you missed half the exam; you had a migraine and could not complete the paper), communicate with your lecturer or your institution's counselling services *immediately after* the exam. Don't wait until you receive your results.

Class formats – virtual and physical

The delivery format of your classes may vary widely: from online classes in a standard LMS or via a meeting application (e.g. Google Hangouts), to an on-campus seminar with desks and chairs, to an augmented-reality learning experience outdoors. We provide explanations for the learning experiences given within these delivery formats in the following list; note that these may be slightly different from what your institution uses:

- In *lectures*, a lecturer presents information to a mass audience of students. See Chapter 2 for information about how to take notes in lectures.