

Live Life, Study Hard

How to get the best out of university



By Martin Hughes - TheUniversityBlog

<http://theuniversityblog.co.uk/>

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Introduction

Life shouldn't stop when you study

Your first year at university is an experiment. You start from scratch, make new friends, change learning methods, discover new hobbies, start a fresh timetable, find a part-time job, explore a whole new world...

There's a lot to take in. In many ways, you're on your own.

Being on your own sounds pretty scary, doesn't it? A bit unfair. A bit stranded.

But don't worry. Being on your own is awesome. Being on your own means you choose your own path. Being on your own gives you freedom to find what works for you.

And that takes time. This ebook helps you combine study life and social life fast. Why go in blind when there's help from someone who already knows the system? Someone who used to be in your position.

Thousands of students start their journey in the same place as you. But your experience will be unique, even if the tools are not.

It's in your best interests to pump your time full of win. That means living life without letting study get in your way.

It's time to love your experience *because* of study, not despite of it.

I'll help you take responsibility of your learning and make good use of your time. Study doesn't have to be hard work.

This ebook isn't about how to research, how to revise, how to manage your word counts, or how to get top marks. That all comes next.

First, you have to appreciate the system. My aim in this ebook is to help you appreciate that system.

Are you ready to grab the goodness on offer?

Happy reading!

- Martin

Part I – Sections 1 to 9

GEARING UP

- 1: Your first year DOES count
- 2: Get serious about university
- 3: The downside to benefits of uni life
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- 5: Make your own decision exactly that!
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I: Your first year DOES count

You'll probably find that your first year doesn't count toward your final grade. The normal reaction is to think that it's okay to do minimal work and just get a bare pass.

"It won't affect my grades."

"There's no point in bothering in the first year."

"The grades don't count because we're busy socialising as Freshers."

Wrong, Wrong, WRONG.

The real reason why the first year marks aren't included in your final grade is this:

The first year is your opportunity to develop a style and get to grips with what's required of you academically. In short, you are being introduced to academic writing.

Don't make the same mistake so many students do. They ignore the real importance of the Fresher year and put in little effort. By not trying hard enough, they have to play catch up the following year.

Instead of making a confident play at the start of the second year, many students slowly start to figure out how they're meant to work. By the end of that year, they finally get a grip of what's necessary.

Sadly, this approach is at the expense of results that **do** count toward their final award.

There is plenty of time to socialise **and** study effectively. On top of that, you'll still have time to do some part-time work for cash if you need to.

There is no need to fear that you won't have enough time. You will.

And if you don't believe me, read on so I can convince you!

2: Get serious about university

The student experience is just as much about social life as it is about study life. Anyone who tells you different is plain wrong.

With so many different shades of new hitting you from all angles, you don't know where to begin. To strike back effectively, you've got to take the entire experience seriously.

If something is significant to you, even a teeny-weeny little bit, it's serious. Even fun stuff. End of story.

Here are 20 reasons to get serious about uni, all the way from Fresher...to finished:

1. Every second counts – Don't waste any time.
2. Every lecture, seminar & assessment makes a difference to your learning – Use each experience wisely. If you're not interested, be clear why. Without good reason, you may not be taking the work seriously enough.
3. Fun is serious (when done right).
4. Serious is fun (when done right).
5. Your future is better managed in advance – Don't wait for life to bite you on the bum. Half the fun is chasing life for the goodies!
6. Each year is different – With each academic year comes a new set of possibilities. Priorities change. Take each year as a new stage in your experience for a better grounding.
7. Each term/semester is different – Another time to change modules, activities, etc. The start of every new term is time to take stock and appreciate how you want/need to move on.
8. You can start planning your career right now – The sooner you take this seriously, the more time you have to show off your potential and talent.
9. You could even start your career as you study – Why not go the whole hog and start your vocational dream?



2: Get serious about university

10. Don't have a career planned? – Even if you're studying mainly for the learning, like I was, you should still consider your future plans and dreams.
11. 'Careless' is different to 'Fun' – You can go absolutely crazy having fun. It's when you stop thinking about your actions that you're liable to do something careless.
12. A careless past can come back to haunt you – Still don't think it's worth taking fun seriously? One day you'll wish you did.
13. The longer you leave a serious approach to university, the more opportunities you'll miss.
14. This is a unique stage of life – Cherish it.
15. Blink and you've missed it – I'm warning you, the years whizz by quick.
16. The quicker you focus on the student life, the quicker you'll settle – And that goes for everything, not just study.
17. You'll have more time to think of a great postgraduate route. – You may never need leave uni again. ;)
18. You don't want to give anyone the excuse not to take you seriously.
19. A lot of issues that you'll encounter again and again in life can be experienced at a more relaxed pace, or in a less demanding way at uni.
20. It's costing you money to study – A wasted day is wasted money.



3: The downside to benefits of uni life

You're free to shape life to suit yourself at uni.

But abuse this freedom and you step backwards. Independence is about responsibility. The less responsible you are, the more dependent you'll become. Be aware of these 10 'gifts' and the possible pitfalls:

1. You can choose when you want to do your work

BUT... You risk never doing it.

SO... Start early and write to-do lists. Break tasks down so you don't have to do everything in one go.

2. You can choose how much time to spend on a project

BUT... You may rush it, or underestimate how long you need to complete the task.

SO... Use some free time to keep things ticking over. For instance, time between lectures and seminars is great. A few extra minutes to crack on without breaking into a sweat.

3. You aren't fixed to a particular study area like you were in school

BUT... You may drift and find nowhere to study.

SO... Highlight all the possible places you could work. Your room, the library, outside, a coffee shop, the Students' Union, etc. Use them all!

4. You aren't pushed by tutors in the same way teachers pushed you

BUT... You could be used to it. When the pushing stops, it no longer feels important...like an 'off' switch.

SO... Adapt to the new routine. You probably didn't like teachers breathing down your neck...why be unhappy now they're not?

5. You can concentrate on what interests you

BUT... It might be to the detriment of less savoury topics/modules that you're required to complete.

SO... Focus on the overall effect and importance of the work. Some topics are an acquired taste, but remember Point 4 above and push yourself when it counts. Don't expect everything to be a breeze.

3: The downside to benefits of uni life

6. You have the freedom to have as much fun as you want

BUT...Fun may be ALL you end up having. When things go wrong further down the line, you'll be having no fun at all.

SO...Study now and reward yourself later. Don't dread the start of an essay...spend 30 minutes in the first few days to build up a fantastic start. You'll have less to dread, less to do later, and more time for fun.

7. You have the scope to develop through clubs, societies, campaigning, sports...the list goes on

BUT...Too many hobbies mean you risk losing focus on your main interests. Too much extra-curricular involvement can dilute everything and impact upon your study.

SO...Stick to a manageable level. Concentrate on a select few interests. Schedule your time so you know what you've got to spare.

8. You're given the tools for independent thought and encouraged to let those ideas flow

BUT...Nobody's telling you what to do. You may be expecting to be given the answers. Without passion and interest, you may begrudge the independent thought.

SO...Grasp the power in both hands. You have the control to shape your research and tackle the subject. Use that control to make it interesting.

9. You have enormous scope to network

BUT...Network too much and you'll be weighed down with hundreds of social invites, thousands of people to follow and millions of e-mails.

SO...Be selective! Network with a purpose, not just so you've got most 'friends' to boast of. Unless you're looking to win a high-profile Student Union election, stop trying to be all things to all people. If you do want to win that election, try to be all things, but remember you aren't really!

10. You are given full independence from Day One

BUT...You're responsible for mistakes and achievements. There's less scope to find others to blame.

SO...Be wise in your independence. The more you take control of what you do, the more you can enjoy your freedom.

4: Five ways you don't get the most from your degree

You rush on campus with enthusiasm and a keen excitement. Bet you can't sustain it completely until you graduate.

Days become weeks, weeks become months... 'Uni life' becomes 'everyday life'. You snuggle into a comfort zone and lose some of that initial power. Here are 5 danger signs to look out for:

1. Commitment too diluted/Too many priorities

Months pass by and priorities change. Old priorities don't let go and you end up with too much on your plate. Stuff you loved doing is now a chore.

Take the most important two or three things you want to commit to over and above everything else. Drop other commitments or limit them to a minimal schedule.

2. Lacking organisation

You can't take advantage of your situation if you're not organised. Reclaim each day with a few moments of forward planning and reviewing.

If you're in a bigger mess, take a day or two to clear the junk. Be ruthless. Sort random piles of stuff into a neater system, then stay on top of it by filing/sorting as you go on. A trap that we all fall in (I know I have fallen in it) is clearing up just to let new things pile up again.

Just because digital information doesn't take up physical space doesn't mean you shouldn't be clearing that out too. Bringing your electronic clutter down to size is just as satisfying. Any aspect of your everyday life can, and should, be de-cluttered to achieve true organisation.

3. You stop caring

Focus on what is important to you RIGHT NOW. What used to be exciting? How can you get that back? Are you looking for a new challenge? Has a particular person or problem taken your positivity away?

In short, are you still living life FOR YOU? If not, get back in the driving seat and take control of the wheel! It's there for the taking.



4: Five ways you don't get the most from your degree

4. You don't want to think for yourself

Review what you believe, what aspects of your learning are most important, and how you prefer to work.

Has a certain subject, lecturer, book, or way of thinking put you off? Did something stop you in your tracks? Anything can become a block and make you despondent.

Bear this in mind:

- You're allowed to disagree with others, even if they are on your reading list, or if they are your lecturer.
- There are rarely solid answers. In art or science, not much has a clear yes/no is/isn't always/never answer.
- You are in control. Don't let anyone or anything put you off. Their reasoning and motives are different to yours. There's no need to compare.

5. Simply overwhelming

Worried about grades? Scared you'll fail? Pressured to do better than you think you can achieve? Too much happening at once? Burning yourself out with too much work and not enough play?

You may think you're the only one suffering. You're not. Not by a long way.

Work backwards. Find where your main concerns are coming from. The problem isn't 'everything', so work backwards from 'everything' to uncover what's REALLY making you lose sleep. In the process, you'll find strength in knowing what you're getting on with JUST FINE.

Write a positives/negatives list. Acknowledge issues that need addressing so you can conquer them directly.

5: Make your own decision exactly that!

Just because 'everyone else does it' doesn't mean you should join in. It may be 'everyone' around you drinking heavily and partying regularly, it may be 'everyone' procrastinating on purpose, it may be 'everyone' moaning about the state of the course without actively trying to change things.

Whatever you see 'everyone' doing, don't be afraid to make your own decision. If you want to do something else, do something else.

Shunning the popular choice can be difficult if it means giving up something you enjoy or challenging yourself to work harder. But it's fine to forego the odd social outing or escapade. You may even be indulging in too many extra-curricular activities. Do you really need to be an active member of seven societies, volunteer for two causes, keep down a part-time job, and try to stay on top of study?

When you make your own decisions, you begin to feel more in touch with what you truly want and need. Don't fear that you'll become arrogant. You can still listen to others, engage in debate, and appreciate that you're not always right. That strengthens your confidence in decision making, allowing clear and independent thought when making commitments.

And don't be scared of doing dumb things, or you'll end up doing nothing at all!



6: Achieving balance

Balance doesn't have to mean sharing everything equally.

Work/life balance is an awareness that you're not pushing too hard in one direction.

Don't assume hard work and social life are entirely separate forms. Business and pleasure often mix, networking 'on the job' can be fun, and study groups are still effective in a relaxed and social atmosphere.

At the start of new academic journey, be mindful of what you're going through. Whether it's your study, social life, part-time job, relationship, or any regular activity in your life, consider how it's going as you live through it. How does it fit in with everything else you're doing?

Some events are impossible to predict. From a perfectly organised perspective, your plans can be turned upside down. Whether these events are welcome or not, be quick in considering how those events will impact upon everything else you're doing.

To do this:

- Analyse how much time new events take up in the day;
- Find ways to speed up regular processes;
- Consider if you can/should stop doing certain tasks in the day;
- Reduce the number of times you focus on the regular tasks that still need completing.

With a bit of planning (and acceptance that unexpected things happen), I believe that balance is possible and never too far away. Perhaps you don't like the word 'balance'. But when you find peace and a personal contentment, you're pretty balanced, whatever you want to call it. That's the main thing.



7: The importance of paying attention

Your whole day is spent giving attention to something, even the mundane. There's always something on your mind.

It's easy to take your attention for granted and forget that it's an important commodity.

Take these points into account:

- You're told to pay attention at school, so you treat attention like an on/off switch. It's time you give this automatic response a third dimension;
- Switching from attentive to unproductive is unhelpful and breeds negative attention;
- Attention can lead to obsession. Too much focus on a single thing destroys attention required for everything else;
- Attention can go in and out of focus. Put your attention glasses on and ditch the blur;
- Attention needs to be fed. It feeds off planning and preparation. A lack of focus equals a lack of attention.

What should you do?

Plan ahead - If you know where you're heading, you won't be forced to consider your position every five minutes. Prepare in advance so you're ready to work from the outset

Recognise when your mind wanders - When distracted, note down what you need and forget about it until later

Put in the initial work - Starting on a new project feels a lot better if you've started on it already.

Give yourself deadlines - A tutor-inflicted deadline is out of your control. Shift a due date forward by a couple of days and you're in charge. Then you can recover more easily from disaster.

Accept limits - Attention cannot be perfected. It's a tool to develop, not master to the highest level.

Pay attention to rest and recreation too – You need to be aware of everything you do;

Set specific goals - You need a solid understanding of what's required with each goal. Don't create a bland set of goals. What does 'write essay' actually mean? Break bigger tasks down into quantifiable chunks.

8: 20 ways to cut down & free up time

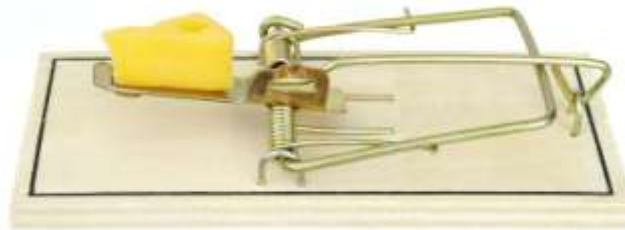
1. No unplanned events. Impromptu is a no-no.
2. Ignore TV.
3. Switch off IM services. And your phone if you can stand it (at least put it on silent!).
4. Switch off Facebook, Twitter, et al.
5. Filter out all unnecessary plans/tasks.
6. Quit something. Do less and win.
7. Order in Most Important Tasks (MIT).
8. Don't let unfinished tasks bog you down. Finish them, or get rid of them completely if unimportant.
9. Declutter. Mess doesn't work for everyone. If it bothers you, get rid of it, make a quick fix, or change your system.
10. Do not be disturbed. No exceptions. Divorce yourself from the world.
11. Stop using so much toothpaste!
Eh? This is [a tip from Sid Savara](#). Savara says: "Unlike a stream running or sand falling in an hourglass, toothpaste does not simply come out of a tube on its own – we force it out and use it up. Similarly, we are not spectators in our own lives with our days, weeks and months passing us by. Each day we make a decision what to do and what not to do. Every moment is our opportunity, but it's a moment that we must choose to use up."
12. Plan a leaving time every time you go out. Stick to it.
13. Be strict. Time is precious. Treat it that way.
14. Don't schedule and forget. Make proper use of a timetable or schedule by checking it at the start and end of each day.
15. Incorporate unexpected events as soon as possible. Make appropriate changes to your schedule right away.
16. Batch tasks. Complete overlapping jobs together to avoid doing the same preparation two or more times.
17. Read my six-part series, "[Make Time for Time](#)".
18. Check times saps like social services and email just once or twice a day.
19. Delegate, if possible and appropriate. Not a typical student option, but don't rule it out. There are times.
20. Keep on top of routine tasks. It's quicker and easier as you go along.



Wouldn't it be great to find an extra hour in the day...

9: Study traps you need to know

- **You compare yourself to others** – Comparisons are excuses, because we're all different. Keep the onus on what benefits you, not what seems to work for someone else.
- **You bow to peer pressure** – You hold the key to how much you study and you're best placed to make sensible decisions. When it's important to knuckle down with work, stay strong.
- **You have a closed mind** – A tiny seed of doubt is enough to bring the shutters down on an open mind. When you reach a dead end, don't stare at the wall blocking you. Seek another way.
- **You use internal excuses to feel better** – "I can't do it *because...*" This is a negative approach. Let your mind expand, not contract!
- **You wait to do all your revision, writing & studying at the last minute** – A classic trap that most of us fall in once, and [many keep falling in](#).
- **You complete the easy tasks first and let other stuff fester** – As the deadline approaches, all the difficult work remains. No wonder you don't want to bother with it!
- **You focus on what you already know, at the expense of what you don't** – If you don't feel challenged, you may not be doing enough.
- **You ignore course notes and tutor plans** – They're there for a reason and they act as a great point to jump off from when researching and revising.
- **You let temptation get in the way** – So many things to do. So many people to see. So many places to be. So many problems if you ignore what's important...



Part 2 – Sections 10 to 19

GETTING DOWN

- 10: Perfectly prepared for lectures
- 11: How seminars & tutorials take you beyond the lecture
- 12: Shifting states: Make writing work for you
- 13: From “Essay Hell” to “Essay Hello”
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- 15: Wonders of the weekend
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10: Perfectly prepared for lectures

Your first lectures are a bit strange. You may think you have to write down every word that's said. What if you miss something crucial? Don't worry, you won't.

Here's my super quick, 2-step rule to making effective notes:

1. **Only write down stuff you don't already know** - There's no point copying everything out just because it's been said. You'll just add unnecessary detail and waste time on information you already understood.
2. **Read notes within 24 hours and attempt to take the information in** - Upon reading, you can do further background reading if you're unclear or want to cement your knowledge by viewing the bigger picture once more.

How do you make the most out of this 2-step method? Here are **10 tips to get the most out of the lecture process**:

1. **Prepare by reading up on the topic.** Get a basic overview to improve comprehension and boost clarity. Even a simple check on Google and Wikipedia will help!
2. **Take water with you.** Your mind will wander if you get thirsty half way through the lecture.
3. **Always note down the module title, the date, and the lecture topic/title.**
4. **Number pages if you write a lot, whether handwritten or typed.**
5. **Note down unanswered questions for asking/researching later.**
6. **Highlight sections/ideas/concepts the lecturer says are important and likely to be part of an essay or exam.**
7. **Listen.** Remain attentive by asking yourself questions as you listen. Consider what the lecturer says and try to evaluate your own opinion throughout. What does it all mean to you?
8. **If the lecturer makes slides/notes available, make notes anyway.** It's not an excuse to stop writing.
9. **If the lecturer doesn't habitually make slides available, ask for them!** The worst they can say is 'No'.
10. **Organise notes soon after the lecture.** The longer you leave them, the less they'll make sense when it comes to revision.

11: How seminars & tutorials take you beyond the lecture

Not marked. Not assessed. Not important? Not likely!

Seminars can make all the difference if you want to achieve good grades with confidence ease. They are a chance to expand upon lecture topics, ask further questions, address problems and concerns, get closer to what's expected in essays/exams, and confirm your understanding of the topic. Quite important, then.

To make the most of each seminar:

- Do the background reading and exercises.
- Prepare as much as you think you need.
- Note down any questions you have in advance.
- Get stuck in! Ask questions, give answers, participate in the discussions.
- Listen for different views and consider how they differ from your own.

Moving things forward:

- Note information that the tutor deems important...it may come up in essay titles and exams.
- Research new points of view that you hadn't come across before.
- Look for new questions that may have risen from the seminar and find possible answers.
- Compare your thoughts with your original lecture notes. Has your view changed?
- Embrace what interests you. These ideas easily lead to arguments you'll want to use in coursework.

What problems can occur:

- You keep quiet – Seminars are for questions and discussion. Nobody has all the answers. Not even the tutor.
- Seminars become lecture extension – Tutors use the time to speak more, rather than allow two-way conversation.
- Lack of preparation – You won't gain greater understanding if you haven't put the initial legwork in.
- Irrelevant questions asked – No question is stupid, but it's easy to veer off topic. Your tutor will steer things back on track. Hopefully...
- Finding arguments intimidating – Seminars are a hotbed of controversy at times. But healthy debate is part of the fun! It tests how far you can keep an argument going and to be aware of potential flaws, so get discussing!

I 2: Shifting states: Make writing work for you

The act of writing is more than a simple set of processes that you either have or don't have. You have the power to form a state in which the writing comes easily.

Before you can be inspired, you have to find the right surroundings and tools...

1. **Writing method** – Your brain responds to how you write. Using pen and paper is completely different to typing on screen. Experiment with what suits you best.
2. **Sitting/Standing** – One graduate told me how writing could be tough when they sat down to write. But stood at a whiteboard they were unstoppable. Paper stuck to the wall at standing height was filled up in no time.
3. **Location** – In your room, in the library, sat on steps, round a mate's house...wherever you are, your emotions change based on your surroundings. Your writing changes shape dependent on where you are. The next time you can't get the words out, pick up your stuff and find somewhere else. Anywhere else!
4. **Format of paper/screen** – Not all paper is the same. There's plain paper, lined paper, squared paper, notation paper, and so on. Standard lined paper may restrict the way you work. Perhaps the perfectly empty canvas of an unruled notebook will take you to the heart of your creativity.
5. **Shape and size of the medium** – Are you an A4 fiend, or an A1 wonder? Do you open the word processor window in fullscreen, or do you keep half the screen real estate available to other applications? A huge piece of blank paper may scream out to some as a challenge, while others see a scary, gaping void.
6. **Time of day & weather** – You can't be effective 24/7. Certain times will suit you better than others. You also take cues from the atmosphere. Does a bright day leave you with a sunny disposition for work? Or do you prefer a dull day for knuckling down? You can't control the weather, but it's wise to be aware of the sky's influence.



I 3: From “Essay Hell” to “Essay Hello”

Before long, assignments hit you from all directions. You know it's important, but that's not enough to fill you with enthusiasm, is it? Here's how you go from “Essay Hell” to “Essay Hello”:

1. **Get the initial work out of the way every time** - As soon as you get details of the task, take action. Start your research, check online resources, scour the library for relevant books.
2. **Write down your initial thoughts** - By getting a few words on the page, you'll have more momentum than staring at a blank page. Those first ideas form the beginnings of your argument. Even if you change opinion later, you've got something to think about straight away. Just 20 minutes should do it.
3. **Break the work down** - The easy option of pulling an all-nighter is by far the toughest option. Instead, use small chunks of time over the duration you've been given to complete the work.
4. **Give yourself a self-imposed deadline** - Why wait for an official deadline? Move it forward a few days...or weeks! You get more time at the end if you encounter problems and you get used to your own time restrictions.
5. **Note small points for later** - You can't always find the words to say, even when you have a good idea. Make a brief note and come back to it later. Then you won't dwell on a single sentence for hours!
6. **Juggle the order** - The introduction doesn't have to be the first thing you write. Nobody will know if you write the conclusion before anything else. Work in an order that suits you. Read through when you're done to make sure you haven't changed argument mid-essay.
7. **Search for resources more than once** – Initial searches for books, quotations and links will be different to a search after a first draft. Return to the research when you can be more specific and target some killer quotations/references.
8. **Find what limits work best for you** - Some students work well with word limits (150 a day, 1,000 a week, etc.). Others prefer setting time limits to get the creative juices flowing. There's no magic answer. With a bit of practice, you can find what you're comfortable with. Experiment. It's what the first year is for!
9. **Respect the editing process** – Good writing rarely comes from a rushed job, so leave time to edit. That's another reason why an all-nighter isn't advisable. A single sitting denies the chance to view with a fresh pair of eyes. Take a break. And when you return, see if you're still happy with the content.
10. **Read it out loud** – Speak the words. Does it sound way-clunky or well-crafted? Alter awkward passages or strike them out completely. Make sure what you read makes sense and refers to the question(s) you're trying to answer.

I 4: Escape from Essay Writer's Block

1. Do some free writing. Let it all out. [Wikipedia has the rules.](#)
2. Don't edit as you go. Leave perfectionism for later. Ignore that Internal Editor!
3. Mix it up. Writing isn't a strictly linear process.
4. Sum up your argument in a few, brief sentences. Armed with your own overview, you've got more to go on.
5. Use headings and notes as a core structure. When you don't know where to start, take the information you already have and create a plan from it.
6. Find quotations to work from. You quote throughout an essay to back up, give examples, and engage. Turn things on their head and start with a quotation.
7. Agree to just one sentence before walking away.
8. Now agree to one paragraph before walking away.
9. Now agree to one section before walking away. Little steps become bigger with confidence.
10. Do/Don't listen to music as you write. Do the thing you normally wouldn't do.
11. Challenge yourself to make 50 points. If you only end up with six points, who cares? You've made six points! Woo!
12. Go for a walk. It clears the mind. Take something to write with in case you wonder while you wander.
13. Get rid of all distractions around you, including on the screen. Try [DarkCopy](#) for uncluttered writing.
14. Deconstruct the essay question. The question is never as simple as you first imagine.
15. Don't go hungry/thirsty. You'll be most productive when you've satisfied your appetite. Just don't eat too much and let indigestion annoy you instead!
16. Stop calling it a block. Calling it a block just blocks you more. Think of it as an opportunity to shine!
17. Take relevant lecture notes, write them out again and work around them.
18. Find dictionary terms for words mentioned. Get inspiration from the definitions. Use a thesaurus for more leads.
19. Take advantage of different mindsets. Tap away at the keyboard for 30 minutes, then write by hand. Spend some time at your desk, then work outside. Your mind reacts differently to each alternative.
20. Refer to your essay as a 'draft'. Don't be scared to let rip. The exact structure and ultimate arguments can wait for the finished work.

15: Wonders of the weekend

With so much vying for your attention during the week, study isn't always top of your list, however important it is.

Uni tips the idea of the weekend on its head. There are fewer events at the weekend and campus is quieter. Saturday and Sunday are boons for productivity.

I recently saw this quotation from '[How to be Idle](#)', by Tom Hodgkinson:

"To be truly idle, you also have to be efficient."

The weekend is perfect for completing the work others do during the week. When the busy weekdays come along, you can spend more time idling and less time worrying about your workload. Good times, here we come!

Even if the weekend means sporting events, meet ups with mates, Sunday morning church services, and so on, you shouldn't find trouble tweaking your routine. There should be more than enough 'dead time' to be proactive in.

I'm not the only one who made the most of this valuable time. [Cal Newport](#) has long been an advocate of a '[Sunday Ritual](#)'. It's great to get up as early as possible on a Sunday (even if it had been an eventful Saturday night...) and enjoy the peace. For me, early mornings were spent walking around the quiet campus, catching up on reading, getting chores and laundry out of the way, writing essay drafts, working on a practically empty campus, and so on.

While others slept, I worked with ease and zero distraction. Once friends started to emerge from their beds, I'd been up and about for hours. It was bliss. Seriously.

Some people thought my workload was nothing compared to my friends. It looked like I was doing less than anyone else. And at that precise moment in time, it was probably true. But if they'd noticed how much I'd achieved while they weren't looking, all would make sense and it would be clear how much effort I'd really put in.

I only made it look easy. Doesn't mean it was a breeze. A relaxed effort, yes. A half-hearted effort, no.



16: Mental necessities of timetabling

Effective timetables depend on how you see the world and what you want to achieve.

The way you plan your future has a big impact upon your success. It's not just what you do in life, it's how you plan it!

For instance, if you're the kind of person who enjoys seeing an empty timetable, it's no good filling it up with small tasks throughout the day.

Before you make any plans, ask yourself how you will make best use of them. Not all to-do lists are the same!

A good timetable brings all your thoughts together and helps them take shape without overwhelming you. A bad timetable just makes you feel like there isn't enough time for everything.

Here are some timetable ideas:

- **Every last action written down and dealt with** – If you like to take stock of everything, no matter how big or small, outline your longer-term goals and intentions first. Only then use persistence, a good diary and a solid technique for getting each extensive daily to-do list sorted. Try not to plan ahead more than a day or two for small tasks. Too much obsession becomes messy. You're meant to get ahead, not get in a tangle.
- **Bare timetable to list only lectures, seminars, meetings, job hours, unavoidable deadlines** – For when you have the focus and determination to work without much procrastination. Large chunks of free time appear for you to work with as necessary. This method is dangerous if you treat all free time as down time. Great if you don't, but do take some time off!
- **A timetable, plus a to-do list** – Do you prefer to separate deadlines with non-urgent to-do tasks? For a bit of flexibility throughout a generally ordered day, consult these two forms of forward planning. Just remember not to confuse yourself by duplicating tasks on both lists.
- **Simple to-do list only** – We all need some sort of timekeeping, but some like it minimal. Write down only the jobs you need to do. But do give enough detail. Rather than say "Write essay" or "Visit library to research X", you could list "Write 200 words for Introduction" or "Find books on reading list and source 5 relevant quotations for coursework".
- **Boxed 24-hour timetable** – [David Seah](#) devised a boxed idea. [It's pretty awesome.](#)

There are many ways of scheduling your day/week/month/year/life, but only you can find what works for you. It's important you do find a working method though, because it makes a big difference to who you are.

17: More pushes to get you working

Difficulty in starting a project isn't always down to procrastination. Many factors buzz around, disrupting your efforts. You may not even know what's causing the problem.

When you want to start, take some nudges in the right direction:

- **Start straight away.** Just get started, even if just for a few moments. Get some momentum and a bit of buzz.
- **Small chunks.** More effective than spending hours in one go. Break tasks down so they're manageable and spread them out over time. In the first few days you'll be a lot closer without breaking into a sweat.
- **Don't treat coursework negatively.** A negative attitude only serves to make you feel worse. When a job's got to be done, it's easier to complete when you stay upbeat.
- **Study buddies.** Some people swear by the power of working with others. They don't have to be on your course because it's mainly moral support for each other. You'll spur each other on to work. That's the aim, at least!
- **Write casual.** Act like you're writing a note, diary entry, Facebook message, or conversation. Switching to scholarly gear isn't an instant process. Get rid of the problem by going casual.
- **Procrastinate AFTER you start, not before.** A bit of a pause is a good thing. Even better when you already have an idea where your coursework is headed...
- **Write drunk, edit sober.** Whether or not you take this advice literally, the point drives home the need to write without fear. Don't clear up as you go along, obsessing over exact words and techniques. When you have the detail, you can edit it suitably. Set aside separate time for that edit.
- **Take inspiration from unlikely sources.** Depends on the subject, but some lend themselves to this exercise. For instance, a generally unrelated lecture may still hold a cue to set you thinking. A news story or a YouTube video could provide you with an idea. Be on the lookout for content that draws you back to your work. Anything is possible.
- **Don't offer yourself rewards for work.** Just make it rewarding! You're studying this for a reason. If it's that dull, pick a different theme/title.



17: More pushes to get you working

- **Find inspiration from quotations.** I don't mean self-help nuggets. I'm referring to quoting others in essays. When you find a killer quotation, write around that. Shape the essay around the quotation, rather than shaping it into the essay.
- **Use your past work as inspiration.** Look back at relevant coursework and use key points and major areas for extending further in your new work. Don't plagiarise yourself though...
- **Change the lighting.** This is a weird one, but it works wonders. If the main light in your room is on, turn it off and use a desk lamp instead. If it's the middle of the day and your curtains are open, see what happens when you close them and have a bit of artificial light. A change in light changes your perspective.
- **Use a timer.** Race yourself. Even 10 minutes can help. Force out some work until the alarm rings. A bit of pressure goes a long way. Timer fans should check out a [free Pomodoro Technique book](#) and '[Cheat Sheet](#)'.
- **Ask the tutor for an interesting reference/starting point.** They won't tell you how to write your essay. Neither will they hold your hand and give you a killer introduction. However, they should be willing to discuss your initial ideas and suggest key areas to explore based on them.
- **Brainstorm and mindmap.** Write lists, make charts, draw pictures, you name it! Pick key concepts, search a bit deeper, and make a rough outline. It looks prettier when it's less linear!
- **Don't research.** Write blind. See how you do and put the research in after you've had a go. If research bogs you down, write first. Even if you scrap it all later on, it's the fact that you've actually given the topic thought that drives you further.



18: What next? Getting through your degree...

This is just the start of the journey. What else could you do? Loads! Here are just a few ideas:

- ***Sign up for some of the free study skills courses/seminars on offer at your uni;***
- ***Experiment, experiment, experiment. Seek inspiration from new pursuits;***
- ***Don't forget about your previous skills. No need to start from scratch each time;***
- ***Remember that what works for someone else won't automatically work for you;***
- ***Treat your learning as a work in progress. Nobody is accomplished enough to stop enjoying new discoveries;***
- ***Use the library for study guides and academic 'how to' books. It's worth investing in your own copy of books that speak to you particularly well;***
- ***Watch out for chinks in your armour. If you don't pay attention, you won't notice your weak points;***
- ***But don't panic about the weaknesses you find. You have the power to turn them into strengths.***

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You'll have a lot of great experiences and some less enjoyable ones too. If you're looking for the perfect university experience, you won't get it. There's no such thing.

Whatever happens, seek help when you need it, be responsible for your choices, and look at the bigger picture at all times. Higher education is amazing, but only if you put the effort in.

Effort doesn't mean pain. I hope this book gives you the opportunity to see that you can be successful on all counts at uni without being stretched.

Time to put things into practice. Enjoy the ride.



**Live Life, Study Hard
by Martin Hughes**

**Feel free to pass this
ebook on to others.**

**Thanks for reading.
Here's to the future!**

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