



1 Introduction

This book is organized into twelve chapters, each of which deals with a major aspect of studying at university. Each chapter contains information, examples, quotations from students and tasks for readers to do. Answers to the tasks, where necessary, are included at the end of each chapter. We have also included a glossary at the beginning of each chapter to explain any words which may be unfamiliar, and a list of useful resources at the end of each chapter, which we hope will stimulate readers to go further in developing their studies.

AIMS

By studying and doing the activities in this chapter you should:

- ◆ understand the purpose of this book;
- ◆ discover how it could be useful for you;
- ◆ get some ideas about what other students think about studying in the UK;
- ◆ start thinking about the advantages and disadvantages you will have; and
- ◆ find out some information about each of the chapters in the book.

GLOSSARY

These key words will be useful to you while reading this chapter:

Asset: A useful quality or skill.

Coping: Dealing successfully with a difficult situation.

Motivated: Wanting to do something well.

Relationships: The way in which people behave towards each other.

Specialist: Someone who has a lot of experience, knowledge or skill in a particular subject.

Strategies: Plans for achieving success.

Summarize: Express the most important facts or ideas in a short and clear form.

The purpose of this book

WHO ARE WE?

We are lecturers who teach students from other countries at university in the UK. Our work is to help students coming to study in the UK to be successful in their studies. Over the years we have learnt a lot about our students, what strengths they have and what help they need. The purpose of this book is to share our experience and that of our students with you to help you succeed at university.

WHO ARE YOU?

You are from a country where English is not the main language, or where the variety of English used is different from the one used in the UK. You want to study or are already studying in a university where English is the medium of instruction. Your English may be very good already, or you may be working on it in preparation for your studies, or studying a specialist subject and improving your English at the same time. You may speak one or more languages besides English and therefore already be a skilled linguist. You also come from a culture which may be different from the culture of the UK.

We are all formed by the culture in which we live and when we move around the world we have to adapt to other cultures. It is important to remember that although in an English medium university everything may be very different from where you have studied before, the knowledge and skills that you have gained from previous study will be your most valuable asset. The subject knowledge you have will be useful even if things are done differently in your new university. You will need to learn to adapt that knowledge to the new environment. Your knowledge of your own language and other languages will help you to develop and refine your knowledge of English. Because everything is new and different you must not forget that you already know a lot and have the ability to study successfully.



How this book could be useful to you

LANGUAGE

First, there is the language. Even if you know the language of the country well, you will probably find that it is spoken in many different ways from those you are used to. There are regional differences: people speak differently in different parts of the country and there may be people from many different countries teaching and studying in your university, all with different accents. There are also social differences: people speak in one way when they are with friends and in other ways at work, to lecturers or to people they don't know very well. You may not be familiar with all the different ways of speaking English in the country where you will be studying, and it may take time to get used to them. We will give you some advice on coping with these differences.

Here are some comments that students made about English in the UK:

Everybody has different pronunciations, even if they're British.

(Japanese student)

People don't understand my accent.

(Bangladeshi student)

I didn't understand the way they say numbers like 'nought' for 'zero'.

(Filipino student)

What we've learnt from university and what we've heard from local people are quite different.

(Chinese student)

People seemed to speak too quickly and I had to ask them to repeat what they say all the time.

(Kenyan student)

BEHAVIOUR

People also behave differently in different countries. People may not be as friendly in the country where you are studying as they are in your home country. This is often

especially true if you are studying in a big city but have come from a small town or island. There are also different customs, so the behaviour of people in your host country may surprise you and your behaviour may surprise them. You may sometimes need to explain your actions or behaviour if people misunderstand you and, likewise, you may need to ask others for explanations of their behaviour. We will describe some of the expectations your lecturers and fellow students may have in the university where you will be studying.

Students say some positive things and some more negative things about different ways of behaving:

They are more easygoing and sometimes very bold.

(Chinese student)

People here won't even give you directions if you're lost.

(Ghanaian student)

More chips, more potatoes, we must have rice every day but English maybe not.

(Chinese student)

Everyone I meet is very friendly and polite, but I was surprised to see almost everyone smoking.

(Ethiopian student)

They like our foreign accent.

(French student)

People are courteous and always say 'please' and 'excuse me' though at times I find it not necessary.

(Kenyan student)

English people do like quiet, but do make noise when they are drunk.

(Chinese student)

APPROACHES TO STUDYING

Approaches to studying are also different in different countries. In the UK and other countries where most education is in English, students at university are expected to be



very independent. You do not have many classes but are given work to do and expected to go to find out information and do the work by yourself. We will give you some advice and strategies for becoming an independent learner, for helping yourself and for getting the help you need from others when you need it. Relationships between students and teachers are also different from country to country.

Students we spoke to made the following comments:

Teachers are more distant from students in my country.

(Bangladeshi student)

The relationship between teachers and students but also between students themselves is quite impersonal.

(Polish student)

Tutorials after class are very, very helpful. I really like that kind of atmosphere.

(Pakistani student)

It encourages students to do more self-education. In my country the teachers try to tell you everything according to the book no matter whether you like it or not.

(Chinese student)

Self-study takes more time than study in my country.

(Vietnamese student)

Few hours in the class, I am used to more time at school and less at home.

(Chinese student)

YOU, THE LEARNER

You will also need to understand yourself as a learner. What approach to studying suits you best and how can you make the most of your skills and improve where you need to? We will describe ways of finding out how you learn best and building on your strengths to learn as much as possible.

YOUR SITUATION

You will learn best if you are happy in what you are doing. Make sure you have chosen

the right course. If you think you have made a mistake in choosing your course, speak to your tutor as soon as possible about it. Make sure you will be able to study in your accommodation or, if that is not possible, that you will be able to use the library or another appropriate space at the university. Make sure you will have enough money and that you will be able to find a suitable part-time job near the university if you need to work. If you have any health problems, find out where you can get medical treatment. If you are disabled, find out what provision there is in the university to help you. All universities will have staff to help you with all these issues but you will need to find them and ask for help if you need it.

Signpost



See Chapter 12 for more information on coping with life at university as an international student.

I found accommodation through the university website.

(Filipino student)

I can find almost all the information I need in the Student Services Centre.

(Chinese student)

The student handbook will help students to know where they can go for help if they need any.

(Ethiopian student)

Task 1.1



Think about any differences you would expect to find between student life in your country and in the UK, and make a list of them.

SUCCESS

One thing you can be sure of – if you want to succeed, you will. If you are motivated in your studies, nothing will stop you. There may be difficult lessons to be learnt but nothing is impossible. We hope that this book will help you.



Before continuing, take a few minutes to think about what your aims are and what you need to do to achieve them. Think also about what advantages you have already. Then think about any areas where you think you might need to improve or get help.

Task 1.2



Write down your aims, starting your sentence: 'My aims at university are ...'

(For example: to get a qualification: BA, postgraduate diploma, masters, PhD, to study abroad for a year and get x credits for my degree in my country, to improve my English, to gain further knowledge of ..., to carry out research in ..., to meet people and enjoy myself.)

Task 1.3



Now think of the advantages you are starting out with and write them down, beginning with: 'The advantages I have already are ...'

(For example: I speak English fluently/to a high standard/quite well, I read quickly, I make friends with people easily, I am very hard working, I already have a lot of knowledge in my subject area, I am good at writing/maths/languages, I am an experienced/quite experienced user of IT.)

Task 1.4



Now think of any areas where you think you may need to improve or get help, starting with: 'I need to improve or may need help in ...'

(For example: I need to read more in depth and get more understanding from my reading, I need practice in discussions and speaking in class, I need to be more accurate in my writing, I need to learn more about the uses of IT in studying, I need to be more organized, I need to find out more about research techniques, I need special equipment to help me study because ...)

Now that you have some idea of what you are looking for, we suggest you read through the summaries of the chapters below and decide which ones will be useful for you. Each chapter will include explanations and theory, examples and activities for you to carry out as well as references to other books, websites and sources of information in case you want to go further in your studies.

Summaries of chapters

CHAPTER 2

This chapter aims to help you understand yourself as a learner and to take responsibility for your own learning. It encourages you to look at your past learning and think about where you were successful and where you were less successful and why. The aim is to help you understand cultural differences in learning methods and the advantages and disadvantages of different methods. Here we look at some theories of how we learn and at how these can be applied in particular situations to help you learn more productively. The chapter will also explain how you can observe yourself as a learner and plan for effective learning, and suggest some strategies to help you improve your English.

Which parts of this chapter will be most useful for you?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Understanding yourself as a learner | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Taking responsibility for learning | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Looking at past learning | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Understanding cultural differences | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Theories of learning | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Observing yourself and planning | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Improving your English | <input type="checkbox"/> |

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter the focus will be on listening and understanding. It will help you to assess your level of listening ability in the different contexts in which you will be listening and tell you about strategies for understanding lectures, seminars and fellow students. All these require different skills and involve you in understanding different



types of language. Lectures will require an understanding of the specialist language of your subjects and particular strategies for listening. In seminars and groups you will also be listening to specialist language but it will be used in a more informal way. The chapter will give you hints for preparing for these activities and ideas for how to improve your listening skills.

Which parts of this chapter will be most useful for you?

Factors that affect understanding	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding in lectures and seminars	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working in small groups	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strategies for listening	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ways of improving listening	<input type="checkbox"/>

CHAPTER 4

An important aspect of studying at university is building a good vocabulary. This chapter explains how to do this. You should learn a little about how English vocabulary is different from many other languages. The chapter will give you strategies for understanding and remembering new words, and will also explain how words are used to create different ways of speaking English, formal and informal, specialized for a particular subject or general for communicating socially. It will help you to recognize which is appropriate in which situation and explain ways of increasing your vocabulary and using dictionaries.

Which parts of this chapter will be most useful for you?

What it means to 'know' a word	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding and remembering new words	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knowing the difference between formal and informal English	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ways of learning vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Choosing and using dictionaries	<input type="checkbox"/>

CHAPTER 5

Here strategies for improving your spoken language will be outlined. As a new student from another country you will probably have plenty of questions to ask and will need to be prepared sometimes to make mistakes. You may need to build up your courage

and practise before speaking out in a seminar or asking a question in a lecture. The chapter will give you some idea of the kind of language to use in these situations and helpful ways of preparing to communicate with your lecturers and your fellow students. It will give you ways of improving your confidence and practising your pronunciation.

Which parts of this chapter will be most useful for you?

Communicating in another language	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning how to ask questions in seminars	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing strategies for participating in seminars	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing skills for group work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving confidence in speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practising pronunciation	<input type="checkbox"/>

CHAPTER 6

In English medium universities it is common practice to ask students to give oral presentations. This means that the students, either individually or in a small group, prepare a topic and then present it formally to the lecturer and the other students in a seminar. For all students, but sometimes especially for those whose first language is not English, presentations may be frightening. This chapter will explain what is usually expected in an oral presentation and give advice on how to prepare for them, including how to build up your confidence and hold the interest of your audience, body language and the use of audio-visual aids.

Which parts of this chapter will be most useful for you?

Planning and preparing a presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Building confidence in speaking to an audience	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using your voice and body language effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>
Preparing and using audio-visual aids	<input type="checkbox"/>
Preparing group presentations	<input type="checkbox"/>

CHAPTER 7

One of the most important activities at university will be reading. All students need to be able to read and understand a wide range of texts from books, journals and electronic



sources. Strategies for effective use of the library will be explained. Here you will find details of how to improve your reading skills and get the most out of your reading. You will learn how to choose your reading and to approach texts from a critical standpoint and recognize bias. The chapter will also cover strategies for remembering what you have read, including different ways of making notes such as pattern notes and linear notes, and using index cards.

Which parts of this chapter will be most useful for you?

-
- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Using the library | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Choosing what to read | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Improving your reading skills | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Learning to recognize bias | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Remembering what you have read | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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CHAPTER 8

Following on from reading, this chapter deals with ways of making notes. This will be very important to you as you collect information from a range of different sources during your studies. The way you make notes relates to your understanding of the information you read or hear, and is dependent on you being able to select what is important. The chapter covers how to choose what to write down in your notes, and different ways of writing notes that will help you to understand and remember later.

Which parts of this chapter will be most useful for you?

-
- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Selecting important information from a text or lecture | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Making notes from reading | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Making notes from lectures | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Writing notes in different ways | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Using notes to understand and remember information | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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CHAPTER 9

This chapter covers perhaps the other most important activity at university – writing. Throughout your time at university you will be required to write a great deal in a variety of forms. These may include essays, reports, case studies, summaries, book

reviews and dissertations, even at undergraduate level. This chapter will explain the different forms and also examine cultural differences in writing. It will explain plagiarism and how to avoid it by referring to your reading in your written work through referencing and bibliography. It will explain how to construct an argument and to make sure that your writing follows a logical structure, and will also deal with the important and difficult skills of editing and proofreading.

Which parts of this chapter will be most useful for you?

Learning about different forms of writing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding plagiarism and how to avoid it	<input type="checkbox"/>
Constructing an argument	<input type="checkbox"/>
Referencing and bibliography	<input type="checkbox"/>
Editing and proofreading	<input type="checkbox"/>

CHAPTER 10

All the information in the preceding chapters is relevant to postgraduate as well as undergraduate students. However postgraduate study is a different stage involving further skills which will be described in this chapter. At this stage students are carrying out more research and dealing with knowledge in a more sophisticated way. The chapter will explain the difference between undergraduate and postgraduate study and give advice on approaching the higher research skills and the demands of the Master's dissertation and the PhD thesis. Types of research methodology and ways of collecting information will be explained as well as ways of analysing and storing data and working with a supervisor.

Which parts of this chapter will be most useful for you?

Understanding the difference between undergraduate and postgraduate study	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research methods	<input type="checkbox"/>
Analysing data	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing at postgraduate level	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working with a supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/>

CHAPTER 11

All students need to take exams, but in most English medium universities these can



take a variety of forms. There are also various conventions and attitudes to exams which may be different from other countries. It is important for students to understand these in order to be able to prepare properly for exams and to have the best possible chance of doing well. In the exam situation the student whose first language is not English is under pressure because of the requirement to write within a time limit. Ways of preparing for and coping with this will be explained.

Which parts of this chapter will be most useful for you?

Understanding attitudes to exams in the UK	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning about different types of exams	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strategies for preparing for exams	<input type="checkbox"/>
How to do your best in an exam	<input type="checkbox"/>

CHAPTER 12

This chapter covers aspects of university life which do not relate directly to your studies, although they will be a part of your life and will make a difference to your well-being and happiness. Information is given about social and sporting activities at university, as well as clubs and societies in which you can meet people and learn about a range of topics. Practical issues such as finance, accommodation, finding a job and getting medical care are also covered.

Which parts of this chapter will be most useful for you?

Information about social and sporting activities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Details of clubs and societies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where to go for practical help	<input type="checkbox"/>

You should now have a good idea of which parts of the book will be especially relevant to you. We hope you will find this book useful and would welcome any comments you wish to make, or any suggestions for additions or improvements.

Good luck with your studies!