

# Mature Students' Orientation Tips

Starting uni after you've been away from study for a period of time can have its challenges, one of which is often self doubt – do we still remember how to study? can we write fast enough to take notes in lectures? do we have what it takes? are we really intelligent enough? BUT, studying as a mature student has distinct advantages. Mature students often do better than younger ones, they know what they want to study, they're here because they want to be here, and they bring a wealth of life experience to their study. Most lecturers really enjoy their mature age students because they're committed to study, to doing the best they can, and making the most of the opportunity.

## Academic

### Have realistic expectations

- You are embarking on a new venture. Give yourself time to familiarize yourself with the university, how it works and what is expected of you as a student.
- It takes time to develop the necessary academic skills. Become familiar with the Academic Skills Office website <http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/resources/academic-skills> If you are having academic difficulties contact your First Year Advisor.
- Have realistic expectations for your first semester assignment results and don't set the bar too high.
- Recognise your limits, prioritise, and *ask for help* when needed. If you are unsure whom to ask, contact the Student Connect Team via email [studentsupport@une.edu.au](mailto:studentsupport@une.edu.au) or via the Student Support hotline on 02 6773 2000
- Set realistic and attainable goals.

### Plan ahead

- Make weekly, monthly, and semester planners <http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/resources/academic-skills/fact-sheets> Have a weekly timetable with all your lectures, practicals, tutorials and other commitments (including study time, meals, household tasks, relaxation time, etc) marked on it. See the Student Welfare Officer at Services UNE for your *student planner*, note all the principal dates, put in all your assignment due dates, how much they are worth, and exams dates and times; use a different colour for each unit.
- Get a whiteboard to hang on your wall. Use it for to-do lists, noting down any ideas for assignments, reminders, etc.
- Make sure you know what information technology and communication requirements you need and be active in ensuring that you have the necessary skills.
- Regularly check the INSIDERS' GUIDE@UNE - it will keep you updated on what's happening: <http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/support/insiders-guide>
- Become familiar with the online provisions for your units in myUNE and the UNE website. For example, you can reserve books or access journals online, and you can find information about the services that the uni offers – financial, academic, IT-related, personal support, etc.
- Make sure you have a study environment that is conducive to study; i.e., distraction free, with the necessary light, ventilation, desk, etc.

### Get the balance right

- Allocate appropriate time for readings, revision and assessments for each unit. Allow approximately 10 hours for each unit of study.
- Allocate more time to assignments that are worth a greater percentage of the course.
- Get a healthy balance between your study and other significant aspects of your life. Map out how you will use your 168 hours each week (e.g., sleep = 56; study = 40; domestic = X; social = X; etc)

## Use the library and computer labs

- They are a great place to do some work while you are on campus.

## Social

- Surround yourself with fun and interesting people so you'll always have good conversation, second opinions, and different perspectives of the world.
- Make friends with other students in your course/ units; possibly meet them for coffee or lunch between lectures.
- Put aside time to unwind with friends and family.
- Join a club or society, make time for your hobbies and interests. <https://unione.unelife.com.au/Clubs/Search?category=2>
- Join a mailing list relevant to your interests, it's a good way to stay in touch with what's happening; e.g., une-events, Mature Students, Townies, etc. There may be other lists that interest you; check out the full list at <http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/support/it-services/email/mailling-list>

## Personal

- Look after yourself. Get plenty of exercise, make time to relax and unwind, eat and sleep well, and have access to a good doctor, counsellor or masseur.
- Returning to study means that you will be investing time and energy in your study, home routines change, and this can prove troublesome for partners, children and intimate friends who were used to being the primary focus of the student's time and caring. Be prepared to discuss and negotiate areas of discontent. Communicate as much as possible about what is happening in your lives. Plan study timetables together, and agree on times for recreation and fun.
- Learning can change one's self-esteem, and alter what one values in oneself and others. You will probably form some new and long lasting friendships. You may find that your thinking changes, your conversation and social circle changes. While this is on the whole a good thing, it can also produce some conflict among those who like you for what you *were*, not for what you *are becoming*. If this causes problems, do see a counsellor.
- Believe in yourself. Have faith in your abilities, try your best and hope for the best.

## Ask for help when you need it.

The longer you leave a problem, the bigger it can get. Tackling problems as soon as they arise can often solve them. No-one will know you need help unless you ask. Even if you think it's a silly question, others may also have similar issues, and besides, it's better to feel a bit silly for a few moments than to allow a problem to escalate.

**UNE Student Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) —(02) 6773 2897**

**Adapted from:** UWS Peer Guide for Mature Age Students; RMIT Returning to Study; Clare Pascoe 2010 Orientation Presentation; ECU Returning to Study.

The support you need to succeed