

Being an OU student



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<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/being-ou-student/content-section-overview>

There you'll also be able to track your progress via your activity record, which you can use to demonstrate your learning.

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Session 1: What's OU study all about?

Introduction

Welcome to this free course, *Being an OU student*.

In this first session, you'll consider what it's like to study at a distance, and think about finding the time to study and what it means to be a student. You'll also find out about one perk of being a student – student discounts!



By the end of this session, you'll be able to:

- understand more about what it's like to study at a distance and what you can expect from the OU
- locate key policy documents you might need
- start to consider how much time you need to set aside for your studies
- know about student discounts
- access your academic email address and free Office 365 account.

You'll start by thinking about studying at a distance. But first, learn about how you'll be using this course.

About this course

Being an OU student is a free course which is around 12 hours long. It is made up of 6 bitesize sessions which typically take around 1.5–2 hours to complete. You can complete

it in stages at a pace to suit you. If you enrol on the course, your progress will be saved so you can come back and pick up where you left off.

Moving around the course

In the 'Summary' at the end of each session, you can find a link to the next week. If at any time you want to return to the start of the course, click on 'Full course description'. From here you can navigate to any part of the course. Alternatively, use the session links at the top of every page of the course.

Using links in the course

Throughout this course you'll be linked out to different places across the OU's websites and the wider internet. To ensure you don't lose your place in this course you should open these in a new browser window or tab. To do this on a computer hold the Ctrl key (or Cmd on a Mac) when you click a link and select to open it in a new window or tab. You should also open quizzes in a new browser or window.

Gaining a digital badge

In completing this course you have the option of gaining a digital badge to recognise your achievement. A digital badge is a way of demonstrating online that you have gained a skill, it will display on your OpenLearn profile and you'll also be able to share with others via social media.

To gain the badge you will need to:

- read each page of the course
- score 50% or more in the end-of-course quiz.

Some of the activities in this course require you to have access to the website for your first module(s). This will usually become available about three weeks before your module(s) starts. You can work through the course earlier than this, but to complete the quiz and gain the badge you'll need to come back once your module website(s) is open. This will also be a helpful refresher of what you've learned just before you start studying.

If you need more guidance on getting a badge and what you can do with it, take a look at the [OpenLearn FAQs](#). When you gain your badge you will receive an email to notify you and you will be able to view and manage all your badges in [My OpenLearn](#) within 24 hours of completing the criteria to gain a badge.

A note on alternative formats

This course is available in a number of alternative formats (Word, PDF, mobi and epub file). Please note that if you need to complete the course offline using one of these formats you will need to contact us using this form to claim your badge – it will not be issued automatically.

1 How do you feel about starting your studies?

You may be feeling a mixture of excitement and nerves about starting your studies. Perhaps you're looking forward to learning new things and the opportunities this will open up for you. You might also be feeling nervous about returning to study after a long break, finding the time to study or how you'll learn at a distance.

This video introduces some the benefits of study and what you can expect on the road ahead.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Benefits of study](#)



Activity 1 How are you feeling now?

Allow about 5 minutes

Take a few minutes to think about how you're feeling about starting your studies.

This might be a good time for you to start taking some notes on this course. You can do this in any way you find useful – a notebook, or a document saved onto a computer or mobile device.

Note down your thoughts in the box below (this is just for you – it won't be viewed by anyone else), or jot them down in your notes.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

One student's comment to this question was:

At the moment, I'm feeling a little nervous and excited about my study. I'm looking forward to learning but am worried about how I'm going to make the time to study, and whether I'll find it too difficult.

Our response to this comment is that it's normal to feel like this, and that the support the OU provides is designed with this in mind. Most other students will be feeling the same way, and there are lots of people such as your tutor and student support team who will support you through your studies. You'll find out more about how you'll be supported later in this course.

The next section will introduce you to what it's like to study at a distance.

2 What will OU study be like?

As an OU student you choose when and where you study, whether that's at home in the evenings, in the local library at the weekend, in the office after work or on the move during your commute. This is different from going to a traditional university, college or school where you would be expected to be at a set place, at a specific time.

The best people to tell you about what OU study is like are other students. Watch the following video of real students for some insights into what you can expect.

Video content is not available in this format.



Studying on your own doesn't mean that you'll be isolated or unsupported in your studies. You'll have a tutor for most modules you study, as well as a team of people at the OU to support you in succeeding in your studies and beyond.

You'll also have opportunities to work with, and meet, other students. Depending on what module(s) you study, you might have live online tutorials, face-to-face tutorials, forums and activities.

You'll also receive high-quality materials to guide you through your studies. The format of these will vary depending on the module you're studying. You may get:

- printed materials delivered to you
- online activities that can be followed either on a computer or a mobile device (these can include quizzes, audio, video and interactive materials).



Figure 1 Printed module materials



Figure 2 Online module materials

You'll also have access to an online study planner to guide you through each week. This can be a great starting point when planning your studies.

3 What does it mean to be an OU student?

What it means to be an OU student won't be the same for everybody but there are certain things that you can expect from us, and in turn we expect from our students. These ways of working together are set out in the Open University Student Charter.

The Charter was developed jointly by the OU Students Association and the University and at its core are four principles. These are:

1. We treat each other with dignity and respect.
2. We aim to inspire and enable learning.
3. We share the responsibility for learning.
4. We work together to secure the University's mission and to promote the University's values.

These values are to be open to people, to places, to methods and to ideas; to be inclusive, innovative and responsive.

The overall message is one of a partnership, not of you and us but all of us, together.

The Charter sets out our general values, but sometimes you might wish to consult a full policy document, for example if you have a problem or need to make a complaint.

All student policy documents can be found in [Student Policies and Regulations](#), as can the Charter.

4 How will I find time to study?

As an OU student you're likely to be fitting study around other commitments. With time and experience you'll become skilled at planning your time and motivating yourself.



Figure 3 Making time for your module.

The majority of modules at the OU are worth 60 or 30 credits.

For a 60-credit module you'll need around 16–18 hours study time per week.

For a 30-credit module the study time will depend on whether the module runs over 22 weeks or 30 weeks and the study time needed each week will be either 14 hours (over 22 weeks) or 8–9 hours (over 30 weeks).

The majority of OU students choose to study part-time. If you're planning to study 120 credits (for example, two 60-credit modules), it's important to know that this is equivalent to full-time study. Many students who try to study 120 credits at once find they cannot sustain it around other commitments such as work, caring responsibilities or childcare, so it is not usually recommended. If you have chosen to start with more than 60 credits you can [contact your student support team](#) for some advice.

Of course, students do not all study at the same speed so these timings can vary. There may be topics that you find easier to absorb, while others require more reading or practice. So the time you need to spend studying will vary slightly from week to week. You might also need more time for your studies when there's an assignment due. Many modules include short breaks, often over key holiday periods such as Christmas, to give you time to catch up or have a short time away from your studies.

Completing this course will help you get into the habit of setting aside time to study. The course requires around 12 hours of your time, but the timescale you complete this over is up to you.

You'll look at time management in more detail in Session 5.

Next, you'll find out about discounts available to students and free software for study.

5 Student discounts and software

Despite being hard work, being a student does have its perks. You may find you're now eligible for a wide range of discounts, and just need some proof you're a student. That's where TOTUM comes in.

The TOTUM card

As an OU student you're eligible to apply for the TOTUM card. TOTUM is the new name for the NUS (National Union of Students) Extra card. This card proves your status as a student and gives you access to a broad range of discounts and offers.

Details on how to apply for the TOTUM card can be found on the [OU Students Association website](#).



Figure 4 The TOTUM card.

The TOTUM card is one way to get discounts, but there are also many other websites and apps you can sign up to for student discounts.

If you'd like to find out more complete this optional activity, otherwise move onto the next section.

Activity 2 Student discounts (optional)

Allow about 10 minutes

Many retailers offer a discount, there are free discount apps you can download, and some software companies have a student license that allows you to purchase software at reduced prices or with additional functionality.

Do an internet search for 'student discounts' and note down some that might be attractive to you and what you need to do to get them.

You might notice some discounts require you to have an academic email address – find out how to get one in the next section.

5.1 Your academic email address

As an OU student you have an academic email address. You don't have to use it – you can continue to use an existing email address for us to contact you so you don't have an additional inbox to check.

If you want to get student discounts, however, you might need to supply and verify an academic email address.

For your academic email address you'll need to know your OUCU (OU computer username). You'll find this on emails the OU has sent you and you might have already used it to sign in to your OU account. You can also find it in your [contact details](#) on StudentHome.

Your OU academic email address is **OUCU@ou.ac.uk** (for example abc123@ou.ac.uk). To use this email address you'll need to sign up to Office 365, which is another free benefit to being an OU student. You'll find out more about this in the next section.

5.2 What is Office 365 and how can I access it?

As a student you're eligible for free access to Office 365 for Education, for the duration of your studies and up to two years after, as long as the OU continues to have an agreement with Microsoft.

Office 365 gives you access to Microsoft Office applications such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint and OneNote.

It's also not essential to use Office 365 to study with the OU. You may already have software you're happy using, but Office 365 does offer some advantages:

- It's online so you can use it on any computer, smartphone or tablet with internet access and easily access your files across all devices.
- No compatibility issues. There are other free office packages that you can use but you may have to convert your assessed work into a suitable format before submitting to the OU. This sometimes changes or corrupts the file. With Office 365, you know the final result is the same as the one you create.
- It's completely free, not a limited trial.
- The online storage facility makes a perfect back-up for your assessed work, notes and study materials while you're studying and you can download it to store after you've finished.
- You can work collaboratively with fellow students in real time.

Getting Office 365

1. Go to portal.office.com.
2. Sign in with your academic email address **OUCU@ou.ac.uk** where OUCU is your computer user name (for example abc123@ou.ac.uk).
3. Your password will be the password you use to sign in to The Open University. You may have received an email prompting you to change your password to be able to access Office 365. Once you have changed your password, you will need to wait for up to 24 hours for your access to be set up.
4. You'll then be taken to the Office 365 set-up page where you can configure Office 365 and access its applications, including your email account.

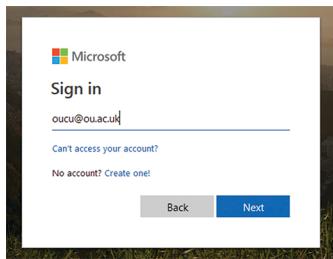


Figure 5 Get Office 365 for free

More details on getting your OU email and Office 365 can be found in the OU's Help Centre. You'll find out more about the Help Centre in the next session.

6 Summary of Session 1

You should now be able to:

- understand a bit about what to expect from distance learning and from the OU
- locate the Open University Student Charter and policy documents
- consider how much time you have available and need to set aside for your studying
- find and use student discounts
- know how to access your academic email address and Office 365.

In the next session, you'll find out where to go for help and support, including your main OU online page – called StudentHome.

You can now go to Session 2.

Session 2: Where do I find everything?

Introduction

In this session you'll explore the different OU online places you'll need to go to as an OU student. Think of this as the equivalent of the 'campus tour' you might get at a face-to-face university, finding out where everything is and where to go for what.



One benefit of OU study is that these resources are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, wherever you have an internet connection. So although there are lots of people to support you, you'll also be able to find a wealth of information, advice and resources online whenever you need to.

You'll start by looking at your main OU online page, called StudentHome. Then you'll find out about the module website which has everything that is relevant to studying your specific module. You'll also look at your Study website which guides you through your qualification (if you're studying one), and show you around the Help Centre, Computing Guide and online Library.

By the end of this session, you'll be able to:

- find your way around StudentHome and your module website
- find and use your Study website, the Help Centre, the Computing Guide and the Library.

1 Navigating StudentHome

As the name suggests, StudentHome is the starting point for almost everything you do online with the OU.

From StudentHome you can:

- access your module website (it opens about 3 weeks before your module start date)
- contact your module tutor or study adviser (you'll be allocated one shortly before your module starts)
- contact your student support team (SST) (you'll find out more about what your SST can help you with in the next session)
- find help and support
- submit and collect assignments
- choose your next module
- check your qualification progress
- check and change your personal details.

Finding your way around StudentHome now will mean you'll be able to quickly find things once your module starts.

Open a new window or tab in your web browser so you can follow the information and activities in this course while looking at your own StudentHome.

Activity 1 Accessing StudentHome

Allow about 5 minutes

The first thing you need to do, if you haven't already, is actually access StudentHome.

Follow the steps below to access StudentHome.

- Go to the OU website at www.open.ac.uk. This is the public page for the OU. Click 'Sign in' at the top of the screen. You'll have been provided with an OUCU (Open University Computer Username) which consists of a series of letters and numbers (usually your initials and a number) and a PI (Personal Identifier) which tends to be a single letter followed by a number. These both remain unchanged throughout your study with the OU. The link to StudentHome and your access details will be in the email you received when you first signed up for study.



Figure 1 OU homepage

2. Enter your registered email address, OUCU or PI as the username and then the password provided to you. If you can't remember the password, then you can reset it on the same page by answering a number of security questions.
3. Use the drop-down options below the password box to choose to sign into StudentHome.

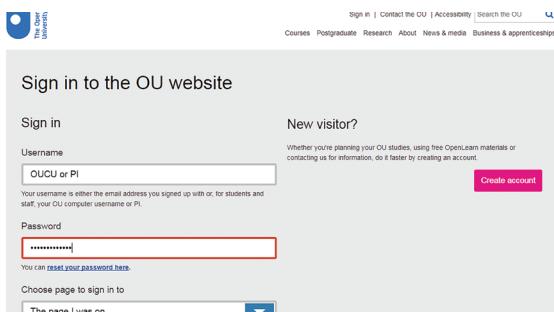


Figure 2 Sign-in page

Now you've accessed StudentHome it's time to explore it in more detail.

1.1 Overview of StudentHome

StudentHome is available to all registered OU students. It's your personal page that contains all the links and information you'll need in your learning journey with the OU.

Activity 2 Exploring StudentHome

Explore the key places on StudentHome in [this virtual tour](#). You might find it helpful to look at this alongside your own StudentHome. StudentHome is personal to you, what you see depends on what you're studying, how you're funding your studies and when your module(s) starts, so it might not be exactly the same as this example.

Now you've explored StudentHome, try updating your profile.

Activity 3 Updating your profile

Allow about 20 minutes

Log into StudentHome, click on 'Update personal details' and then 'Edit your online appearance' (under Settings).

Click on 'Edit online appearance'.

Upload an image that you're happy to share on your profile. It doesn't have to be a picture of you: use a picture of a pet or a cartoon image if you'd prefer.

Add the detail you feel comfortable with to the profile and then select the level of visibility for your profile and email address.

Now you've got to know StudentHome, let's take a look at the website that is specific to your module.

2 Your module website

Your module website is the key focus for your studies. It's where you'll find your module-specific material, tutorial arrangements and assignments.

Each module has its own set of resources, activities and discussions but the layout of the module front page is built on the same structure for every module.

You'll usually be able to access it around three weeks before the start date for the module, so depending on when you are studying this course, you may or may not be able to access your own module website on StudentHome yet.

Watch the following video to familiarise yourself with a typical module website.

Video content is not available in this format.



INTRODUCTION TO YOUR MODULE WEBSITE

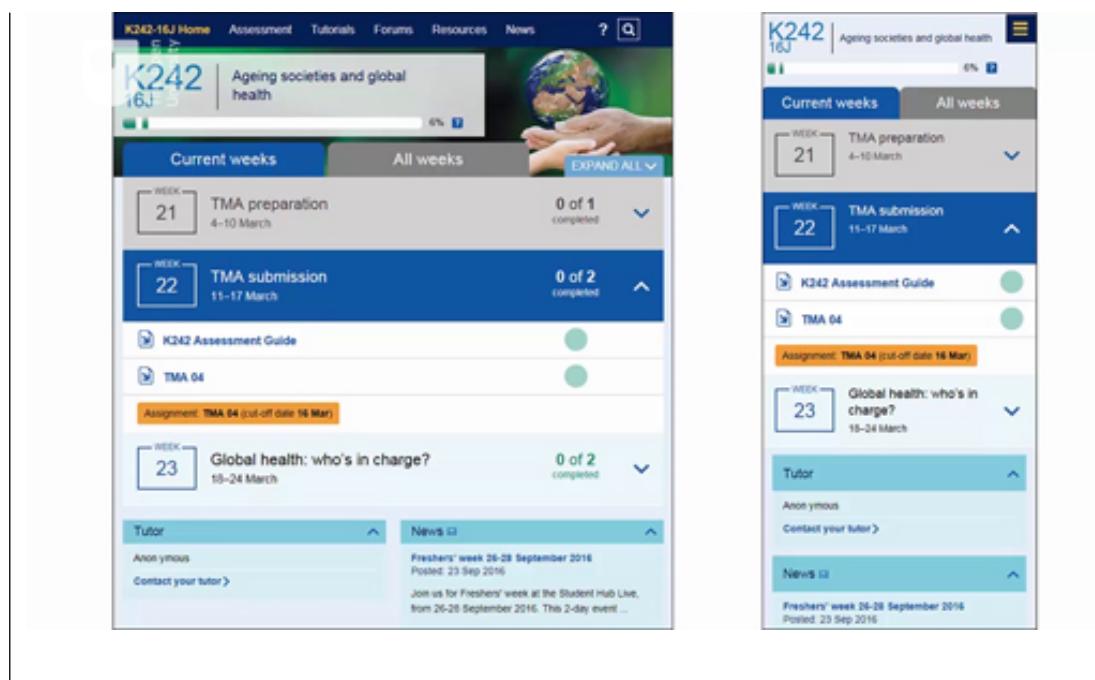
The common features on the module website are as follows.

The study planner

This shows the module activity week-by-week. You're given the date that the week starts and any specific resources you need to access. If your course has an online guide, then there are clear links to this as well. You can use the planner to keep track of your progress by clicking the progress indicators on the planner. You have the choice of having either a narrow view (just the current three weeks of information shown) or an expanded view (showing all weeks). The planner is a great way of finding out what you should be doing when and helping you to get there quickly.

Here is a video explaining how the study planner works.

Video content is not available in this format.



Your tutor's details

Most modules have dedicated module tutors – you'll find out about the role of the tutor in Session 3. If you have a specific tutor allocated to you, then their name and contact details will be shown on the module website.

Assessments

Details on your assignments can be found here. You can access the questions and your marks once you start receiving them. You'll look at assessment later in this course.

Tutorials

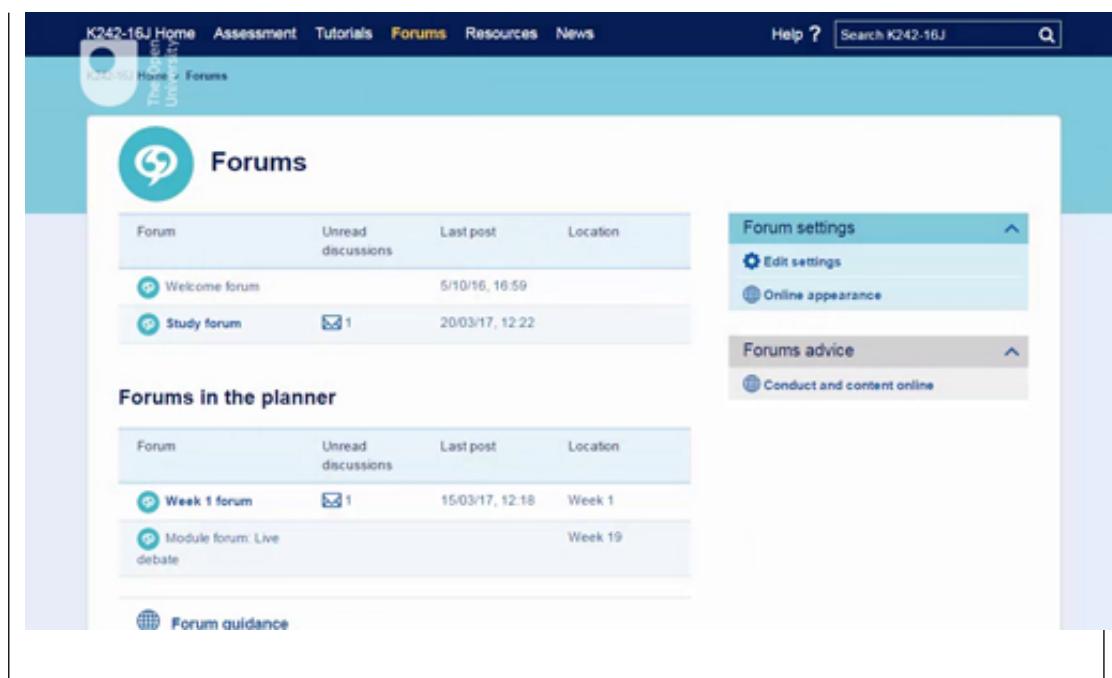
Many modules have tutorials. These may be face-to-face or online. Details of the tutorials, their location and a tutorial booking system can be found on your module website.

Forums

Most OU modules give you the opportunity to engage with other students, discussing academic ideas, asking questions or generally chatting. These discussions take place in the forums. Your tutor may also use the forum just for your tutor group to post instructions for module activities, notes from tutorials or general feedback.

This video explains how forums work. We'll take you through them in more detail in Session 4.

Video content is not available in this format.



The screenshot shows the 'Forums' section of a module website. At the top, there are navigation links: K242-16J Home, Assessment, Tutorials, Forums (highlighted in yellow), Resources, and News. To the right is a search bar and a help icon.

Forums

Forum	Unread discussions	Last post	Location
Welcome forum		5/10/16, 16:59	
Study forum	1	20/03/17, 12:22	

Forum settings

- Edit settings
- Online appearance

Forums advice

- Conduct and content online

Forums in the planner

Forum	Unread discussions	Last post	Location
Week 1 forum	1	15/03/17, 12:18	Week 1
Module forum: Live debate			Week 19

Forum guidance

Resources

Some modules provide you with additional resources that may be helpful for the module. These will be found, perhaps unsurprisingly, under the heading of 'Resources'. This is also where you'll find downloadable copies of some of the module material for you to store on your computer or mobile device to use when offline.

News

Rather than filling up your inbox with lots of messages, the OU will post general information for you and specific-module information on the module website. If you want this information emailed to you can choose to 'subscribe' to this. It's also very easy, and instant, to 'unsubscribe' from any messages.

Activity 4 Checking information on your module website

Allow about 15 minutes

This activity can only be completed if your module is due to start within the next three weeks. If your module start is more than three weeks away, then the module website may not be available, so come back and try this closer to the start date.

STEP 1: Go to StudentHome and click on the link to your module website from the central panel.

STEP 2: Explore the site and find out the following:

- the name of your tutor or study adviser
- how many TMAs there are for the module
- when the first TMA is due
- if there are any messages on the course-wide forum

- whether there are any messages in the tutor group forum.

Did you manage to find all this information?

Discussion

There is a lot to get used to in the first few weeks or so of studying. Just try and spend a little time getting to know where things are in the module website.

Next you'll look at the OU websites dedicated to qualifications and wider subject resources, rather than individual modules.

3 Your Study website

If you're studying towards a qualification, you'll also have access to a website offering you resources to support you in getting the most out of your studies.

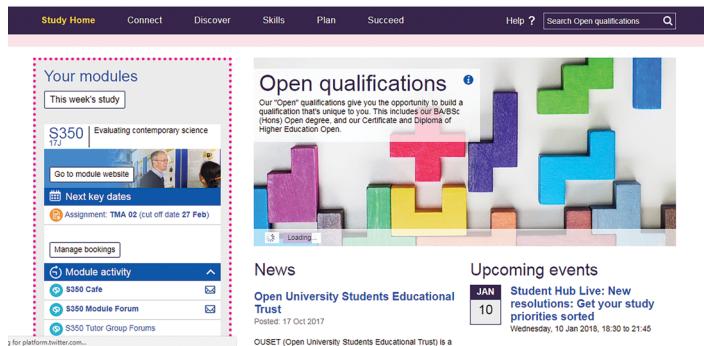


Figure 3 A Study website

You can access this by clicking on 'Study' in the top navigation links that you'll find across StudentHome and your module website(s).

If your module is about to start you'll also find a link like this in the central panel of your StudentHome.

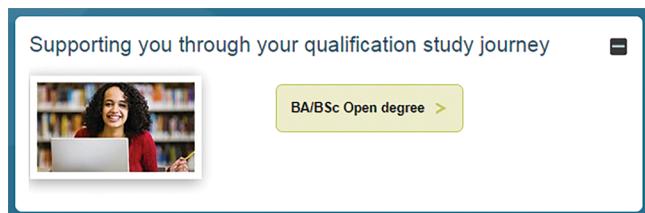


Figure 4 StudentHome link for support for your qualification study journey

Here you'll find useful resources to prepare before you start and when you're in between modules, as well as news and events you may be interested in and forums you can participate in. After you complete this course you'll be directed to your Study website to get started on learning about what you'll be studying.

There might be times when you have a question about your studies – don't worry there's somewhere you can go for help. That's the subject of the next section.

4 The Help Centre

The Help Centre is an easy way to access general support and get answers to commonly asked questions quickly. It covers general information you might need throughout your studies, such as help with study skills or how to submit an assignment.

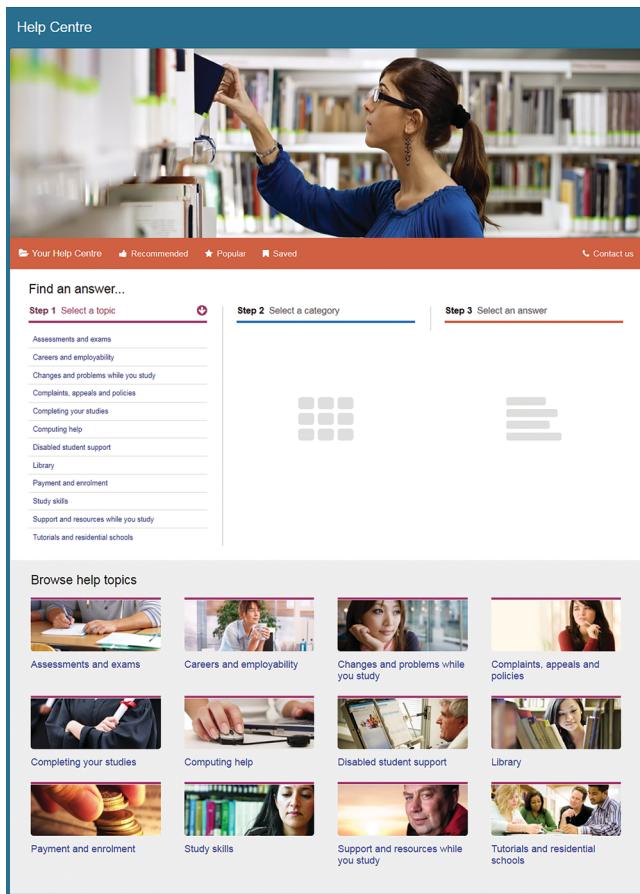


Figure 5 The Help Centre

There are three ways to find the help you want. They all get you to the same information – so it's down to your personal preference and how specific a question you have in mind as to which you use.

You can use the search function, the 'find an answer' function which allows you to select a topic of interest or the 'Browse help topics' function. This allows you to explore wider topics without having a specific question to be answered.

Try this for yourself in the next activity.

Activity 5 Searching the Help Centre and saving a page

Allow about 10 minutes

Find the answer to the question: 'How do I book a tutorial?'

You can use any of the different approaches to searching mentioned above.

Once you've found an article that answers this question, scroll down to the bottom of the page and click the 'Save this page' button.

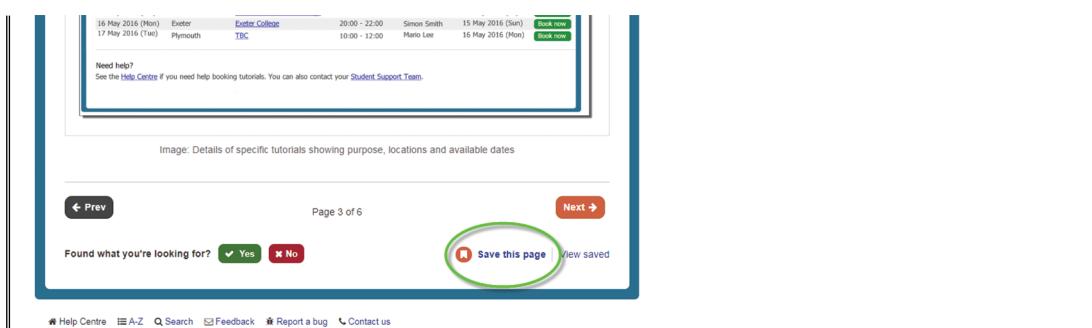


Image: Details of specific tutorials showing purpose, locations and available dates

16 May 2016 (Mon)
17 May 2016 (Tue)
Exeter
Plymouth
Exeter College
TBC
20:00 - 22:00
10:00 - 12:00
Simon Smith
Mario Lee
15 May 2016 (Sun)
16 May 2016 (Mon)
[Book now](#)
[Book now](#)

Need help?
See the [Help Centre](#) if you need help booking tutorials. You can also contact your [Student Support Team](#).

← Prev Page 3 of 6 Next →

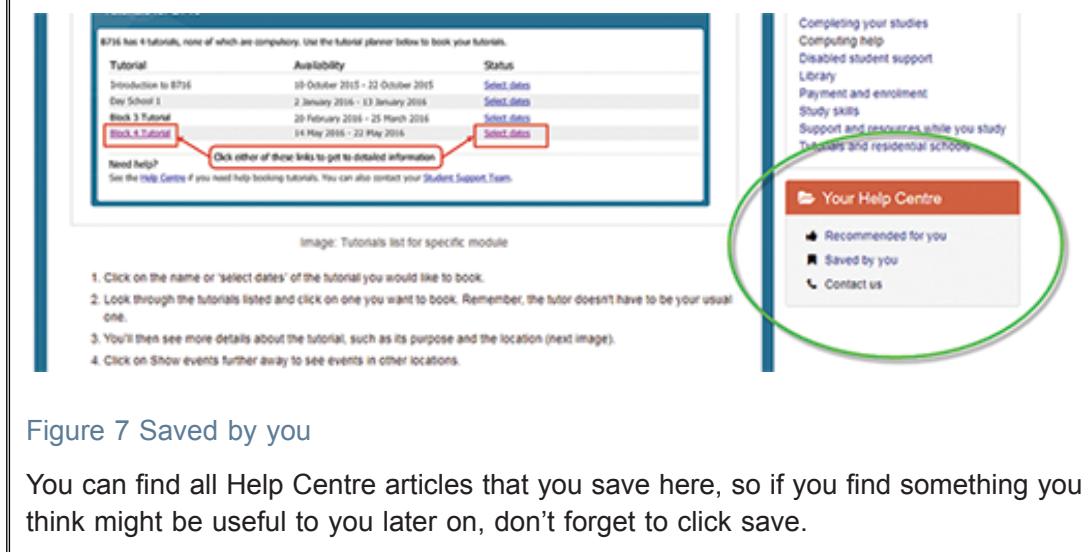
Found what you're looking for? Yes No

[Save this page](#) New saved

[Help Centre](#) [A-Z](#) [Search](#) [Feedback](#) [Report a bug](#) [Contact us](#)

Figure 6 Save this page

In the right-hand column of the Help Centre you'll see a section called 'Your Help Centre' with a link 'Saved by you'.



B736 has 4 tutorials, none of which are compulsory. Use the tutorial planner below to book your tutorials.

Tutorial	Availability	Status
Introduction to B736	10 October 2015 - 22 October 2015	Select dates
Day School 1	2 January 2016 - 13 January 2016	Select dates
Block 3 Tutorial	20 February 2016 - 25 March 2016	Select dates
Block 4 Tutorial	14 May 2016 - 22 May 2016	Select dates

Need help?
See the [Help Centre](#) if you need help booking tutorials. You can also contact your [Student Support Team](#).

1. Click on the name or 'select dates' of the tutorial you would like to book.
2. Look through the tutorials listed and click on one you want to book. Remember, the tutor doesn't have to be your usual one.
3. You'll then see more details about the tutorial, such as its purpose and the location (next image).
4. Click on Show events further away to see events in other locations.

Your Help Centre

- Recommended for you
- Saved by you
- Contact us

Figure 7 Saved by you

You can find all Help Centre articles that you save here, so if you find something you think might be useful to you later on, don't forget to click save.

There's a lot of useful stuff in the Help Centre – it's a great starting point for any general queries you have. If you need help with more technical issues such as using your module website or some software, the Computing Guide is the place to go.

5 Computing Guide

You can access the Computing Guide either from StudentHome, where you click on 'Computing Guide' in the 'Tools' section on the left-hand side of the page, by clicking the 'Help' tab at the top left-hand corner of any page in your module website or searching the Help Centre.

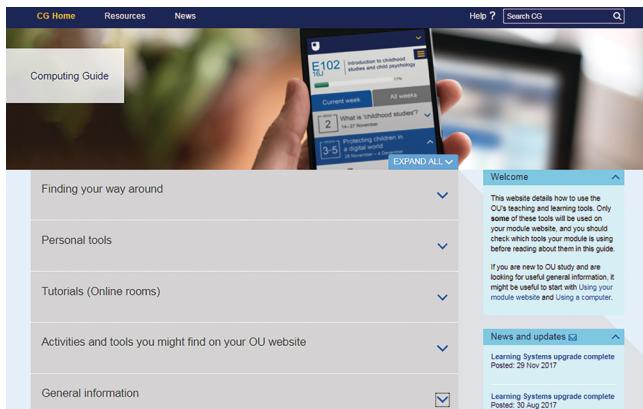


Figure 8 The Computing Guide

The Computing Guide is a great help if you're struggling to do something or to refresh your memory on the things you have learned here.

There is a broad range of videos, walk-throughs and instructions on how to get the most out of your online study.

If you are familiar with using bookmarks in your browser, you may find it useful to bookmark the guide for future reference or you can just make a note of the link in your notes.

All universities have extensive academic libraries, and the OU is no exception to this.

There is a physical library building in Milton Keynes and you may be wondering how you can possibly get access to this as a distance learner. Well, the good news is the Library is also online.

6 The OU Library

Through the [online Library](#) you'll be able to access quality-assured and trusted resources that are selected and assessed by subject specialists and academics. The extensive range of journals and magazines, academic books, newspapers, dictionaries and encyclopaedias are just some of the resources you'll be able to use to:

- find information for your assignments or projects
- explore further reading for your module
- carry out in-depth research or explore specific subjects.

You may not need to search for resources in the early stages of your studies but the Library also has resources to help you to develop skills that will support you as you study, at work or in everyday life.

Watch this short video introducing the OU Library services.

Video content is not available in this format.



You can find a link to the library in the top navigation links that you'll find across StudentHome and your module website(s).

Getting started with the online Library

You're probably familiar with libraries as a place to borrow and return books but you may not have used them for academic research before.

Don't worry: there's plenty of support available and you'll be introduced to this over the course of your studies. You can find lots of self-help resources on the Library website under 'Getting started'.

Library Helpdesk staff are available seven days a week to help you make the most of the online Library and advise you on finding and using information for your studies. There is a 24/7 chat service or you can email your query or speak to someone.

Video content is not available in this format.



The Library also runs live online training sessions throughout the year which are designed to help you make the most of online library resources while you're studying, when you're at work, or for everyday life. They also run live Facebook events, and have recorded guides to help you use library resources to benefit your studies.

Explore events that are coming up in this next short activity.

Activity 6 Library training events

Allow about 5 minutes

Go to the Library homepage and locate the next event. Then explore the recorded events that are available.

There is no need to watch any of these at the moment. The thing for now is know where to find them and what kind of subjects are covered.

If you struggle to find a recording, have a look at the discussion below where there is a step-by-step guide.

Discussion

STEP 1: Click on the 'Library' link on StudentHome.

STEP 2: Click the 'Training and events' tab on the Library home page.

STEP 3: Click the 'Using Library Search for your assignment' link in the 'Training and events' box.

As well as the OU's own library you also have access to other university libraries. You'll find out how to use them in the next section.

6.1 Using other university libraries

The OU belongs to a national scheme called 'SCONUL Access', which enables you to borrow books from many other university libraries in the UK and Ireland. Or, if you live near another university library, you might just want to use it as a quiet place to study.

This next activity will help you get started with this.

Activity 7 Accessing SCONUL

Allow about 5 minutes

Visit the [SCONUL website](#) and locate the closest library to where you live or work that is part of the scheme.

If you decide you want to join the scheme, you need to register for a library card (universities will not accept other forms of ID). To start the process, follow the step-by-step instructions on the SCONUL website.

There's been a lot of information to take on board in this session, so the quiz in the next section will give you a chance to check if you know your way around.

7 Where do I find...? quiz

Test your learning in the following short quiz.

Activity 8 Where do I find ...?

Allow about 10 minutes

This short quiz will ask you to identify where to find the answer to specific questions.

How do you find the following things?

Cut-off dates for assignments:

- Computing Guide
- Module website or StudentHome
- Module website
- StudentHome
- Help Centre
- Library website

How to add a header to a Word document:

- StudentHome
- Module website
- Module website or StudentHome
- Computing Guide
- Help Centre
- Library website

A breakdown of the entire module by week:

- Module website
- Computing Guide
- Module website or StudentHome
- StudentHome
- Help Centre
- Library website

How to update your contact details:

- Module website
- Computing Guide
- StudentHome
- Module website or StudentHome
- Help Centre
- Library website

How to arrange support if you have a disability:

- Computing Guide
- Help Centre
- Module website
- StudentHome

- Module website or StudentHome
- Library website

OU Harvard Referencing Guide:

- Module website or StudentHome
- Help Centre
- StudentHome
- Module website
- Computing Guide
- Library website

Discussion

You can also find the assignment cut-off dates on both the module record page of StudentHome and in the Assessment tab of your module website.

Hopefully you now feel you know your way around the online spaces you'll use as an OU student.

8 The OU campus

You'll have read earlier in the session that there is a physical Library at the OU. This is part of a large campus in Milton Keynes where many of the staff who write the modules and support students are based. There are also research students studying on campus.

Every year the OU Students Association run a conference on campus (look out for your invitation to apply to attend – it normally happens in June).

You'll probably never need to actually visit the campus, but if you're in the area you're welcome to pop in and use the Library.

9 Summary of Session 2

You should now be able to:

- navigate StudentHome
- navigate your module website
- find and use your Study website
- find and use the Help Centre, Computing Guide and the Library

In the next session you'll find out who'll be supporting you while you study.

You can now go to Session 3.

Session 3: How will I get support?

Introduction

In this session you'll find out who'll be supporting you during your studies with the OU and how to access that support. You'll also look at how to get involved in the OU community using social media and by becoming involved with the OU Student Association.



By the end of this session, you'll be able to:

- decide who to contact in the OU in different situations
- get help to support your mental wellbeing
- join in with the OU community.

When you have completed the course we would really appreciate your feedback. If you would like to share your experiences of taking this course, please fill in this [short survey](#).

1 Who's who in the OU?

With the OU you have a broad support network of people who are all focused on helping you to achieve your study goals.

You'll now hear from people who are there to help you in different ways. All the people in these videos are real staff in the role they are discussing.

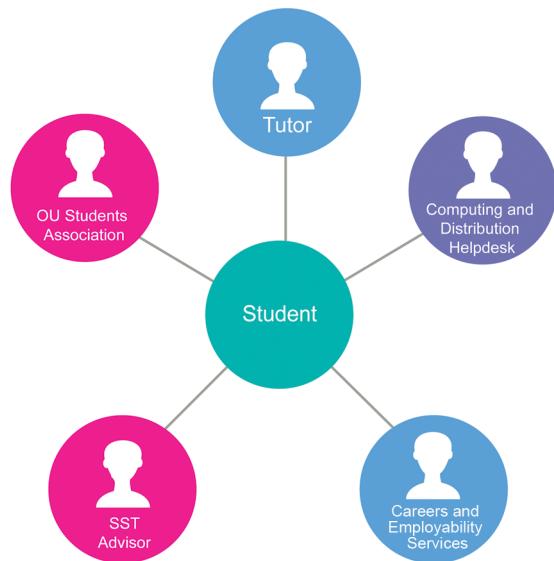


Figure 1 Your support network

1.1 Student support team (SST) adviser

In this first video Zach Keaton, a senior adviser, tells you about the how your student support team can help you out and what advice they can give you.

Video content is not available in this format.



If you have a question that is specifically about the content of your module it is better to contact your tutor in the first instance.

In the next section you'll learn about the role of your tutor.

1.2 Your tutor

On most modules you'll be allocated a tutor, also known as an associate lecturer, who'll support you throughout your module, mark your assignments and give you feedback.

During a module your tutor is likely to be the first person you turn to for help and advice. This next video gives you an idea of the role your tutor plays in your studies.

Video content is not available in this format.



Next, meet the Computing and Distribution helpdesk.

1.3 The Computing and Distribution helpdesk advisors

Here Marjorie explains what the Computing and Distribution helpdesk can give you a hand with and the ways to contact them.

Video content is not available in this format.



Next, hear about how the OU Students Association can support you.

1.4 OU Students Association

Like most universities, the OU has its own students' union which you automatically become a member of. The Students Association provides a wide range of support as well as ways to get involved with The Open University. President of the Students Association, Cath Brown, is here to give you a small taster of what is on offer. You'll learn more later in this session.

Video content is not available in this format.



Next, find out about the Careers and Employability Services available to you.

1.5 Careers and Employability Services

As an OU student you have access to careers information and advice from a specialist team of advisors.

In this video, Lynne Johnson, a member of the Careers and Employability Services team (CES), tells you more about the services they offer.

Video content is not available in this format.



As well as the direct one-to-one support the CES team provides, there are lots of resources available to help you plan your career: including a comprehensive website and the [Career Planning Workbook](#), as mentioned in the video, which is a great way to start thinking about your future career.

Webinars and forums

CES also run webinars and forums covering a range of topics. Many of the sessions are recorded, so even if you can't take part at the time you won't miss out. There's also lots of material you can access in an archive.

Subjects covered include things like:

- Getting your foot in the door with an application form
- Refining your CV
- Careers in teaching.

There are also specific sessions run by large organisations looking to recruit OU graduates.

Activity 1 Careers webinars and forums

Allow about 10 minutes

- a. Find the careers forum and webinar workspace (hint: search the Help Centre) and find out what webinars and forums are coming up. You might like to make a note of any that interest you.
- b. Look at the list of recorded webinars and note down at least two that you feel could be of use to you.

Discussion

What you'll have found of interest will, of course, be very individual to you. You'll have noticed that many of the webinars are subject specific, eg Routes into accounting, while others were more generic and applicable to students from any subject area, e.g. Refining your CV.

For now you may find it useful to bookmark the site or make a note for yourself where to find it.

Now, you will look in more detail about how to access support across the university.

2 Accessing support

Earlier you heard members of various teams explaining how they can help you, but how do you get in touch with them?

To make things easier you can find summarised contact details and what they can do to help in the following table.

Table 1 Your key OU contacts

Role Name	What they provide	How to contact them
SST adviser	Help with module and qualification choice	Direct contact form on StudentHome.
	Help with funding issues	Contact details also in ' Contact us ' in the Help Centre.
	Support if you have a disability or health issue	
	Organising additional study skills support sessions	
Tutor	Help with changing modules and qualifications	
	Guidance and help on module content	Name and contact details available on StudentHome and in ' Contact us ' in the Help Centre.
	General support during your module	
	Guidance and feedback on assessments	Your tutor will send specific details on how and when to contact them.
Computing and Distribution Helpdesk	Delivery of tutorials	
	Advice on academic practice and skills	
	Help with accessing your module website, installing software and using OU systems	Contact details available in ' Contact us ' in the Help Centre.
	Queries about study materials – e.g. if they don't arrive as expected	
Careers and Employability Services	One to one careers advice	Via the careers website .
	Help with writing a CV, interview technique and job seeking.	You'll also find a link at the top of your StudentHome page
OU Students Association	Forums, societies and groups to connect with other students and share support and tips	Via the OU Students Association website .
	Nightline – a listening, emotional support service run by students for students	

We asked some students to film themselves talking about how and why they have contacted support services at the OU. Listen to what they have to say. The key thing to remember is that, if you have any questions or concerns, always get in touch with us.

Video content is not available in this format.

Contacting the OU



The Open
University



2.1 Who should you contact?

Now try this activity about who to contact.

Activity 2 Who to contact

Allow about 10 minutes

This short quiz gives you a variety of situations in which an OU student might find themselves. You just need to decide for each situation who the student should contact for help.

Run by students, for students. This is the community and voice for all Open University students:

- Tutor
- Careers and Employability Services
- Computing and Distribution Helpdesk
- OU Students Association
- SST advisor

Provides personal feedback on your assignment to help you improve:

- OU Students Association
- Tutor
- Careers and Employability Services
- Computing and Distribution Helpdesk
- SST advisor

Gives help and advice if you need to change or delay your study:

- SST advisor

- Tutor
- Careers and Employability Services
- Computing and Distribution Helpdesk
- OU Students Association

Offers help if you have technical problems submitting an assignment:

- Tutor
- Careers and Employability Services
- OU Students Association
- SST advisor
- Computing and Distribution Helpdesk

Provides advice on how to define your goals and make the most of your skills and interests:

- Careers and Employability Services
- Tutor
- OU Students Association
- Computing and Distribution Helpdesk
- SST advisor

Provides information on the NUS card:

- Careers and Employability Services
- Tutor
- OU Students Association
- Computing and Distribution Helpdesk
- SST advisor

Can help resolve funding issues:

- Computing and Distribution Helpdesk
- SST advisor
- Tutor
- Careers and Employability Services
- OU Students Association

Gives guidance on module specific content:

- Tutor
- OU Students Association
- Careers and Employability Services
- Computing and Distribution Helpdesk
- SST advisor

Gives help if you do not receive the books you were expecting:

- Careers and Employability Services
- OU Students Association
- SST advisor
- Computing and Distribution Helpdesk
- Tutor

Runs webinars on writing CVs:

- Careers and Employability Services

- Tutor
- OU Students Association
- Computing and Distribution Helpdesk
- SST advisor

3 Support if you have a disability

As well as all the ways of getting help you've already looked at, the OU has a dedicated team to support you if you have a disability, long-term health condition, specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia) or mental health difficulty.

You might not necessarily think of yourself as disabled but we use the term 'disabled student' to describe a student who has any kind of the following:

- physical or sensory disability
- ongoing physical health condition
- ongoing mental health difficulty
- specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia)
- Autism Spectrum Syndrome
- speech and language difficulty.

There's a variety of support available, including:

- Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) to cover the additional study costs related to your disability
- study materials in alternative formats
- specialist equipment and software
- personal study support such as a dyslexia tutor or mental health mentor.

If this is relevant to you and you haven't already told us you have a disability, go to 'Your profile' in StudentHome (go back to the 'StudentHome' section of Session 2 if you're not sure where to find this). Click on 'Identity, needs and circumstances' in the 'About you' column and there you'll see an option to edit your details and tell us you have a disability.

If you already told us you have a disability when you signed up but haven't yet requested any support, go to [Timescales for getting disability support](#) in the Help Centre. You might also want to browse around the [Disability support](#) topic to find out more about what's available.

It's important to request support as early as possible before you start studying as it can take time to arrange.

4 Mental wellbeing

Studying can, at times, be challenging or you may face other difficulties in your life that impact on your studies. It's important to take care of your mental health and the OU is committed to supporting you in doing this.

If you have a mental health difficulty, or are concerned about how studying could impact on your mental wellbeing take a look at [support if you have a mental health difficulty](#).

There is a useful booklet with tips for managing study and staying mentally healthy and information on disclosing mental health difficulties and support you may benefit from.

You also might be interested in exploring some resources we have collated on [wellbeing and mindfulness](#). This includes details of how to access Big White Wall, a free mental health and wellbeing support service. Perhaps bookmark this page so you can refer back if you find you need some support.

Remember, if things do get too much during your studies, you can always talk to your tutor or SST.

Now let's look again at the OU Students Association and other ways that you can be involved in the OU community.

5 The OU community

You've seen now that even though you are learning at a distance, support and community are always close at hand.

Some of the ways in which you can get involved in the OU community include the Students Association, online interactive events and social media. Let's look at each of these in turn.

The OU Students Association

As an OU student you are automatically a member of the OU Students Association. You heard from a Students Association volunteer earlier in this session. Your

[OU Students Association](#) enables you to influence how your University is run. They exist to promote your interests and to ensure the OU is more than just a place of learning – it's a student community.

The Students Association aim to help you make the most of your time studying. Depending on what you're interested in, they can help you get in touch with other students, get involved, find information and news, get help, attend events and access services to support your learning.

Like a student union, they also run a freshers' fair every year – so new students, like you, can find out about all the opportunities to get involved.

Student Hub Live

The Student Hub Live is a series of live, online and interactive events open to the whole OU community. There are events throughout the year about a variety of topics. Previous events have looked at the Rosetta Mission to Mars, study skills, the EU Referendum and more! There are also usually specific events aimed at welcoming new students.

Student Hub Live events allow you to interact through the live chat, interactive activities and by putting your thoughts, comments and questions to our guests in the studio. They are a fantastic way to meet fellow OU students, find out about the exciting things happening at the OU and meet the academics that you may come across in your module materials, on forums, and in audio and video resources.

You might like to take a look at [Student Hub Live](#) now, or make a note to do this later.

This next activity gives you a chance to explore what's going on in the OU community.

Activity 3 Getting involved in the OU community

Allow about 10 minutes

Go to StudentHome, click on the 'Community' link in the top right-hand corner and find out what social events and activities are happening soon.

Discussion

Are there any events local to you or any that you might join online? The answer will depend on where you are based and what you're interested in. Remember to revisit the Community page on a regular basis to check for new events.

Next you'll explore another way to get involved in the OU community: social media.

5.1 Social media

You have plenty of opportunities to engage with your fellow students and keep up with OU news and events on social media while you study at the OU, but only if you want to. By social media we mean public sites and services outside of the OU websites and forums, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Using social media is not compulsory so don't feel you need to sign up for or use a social media account if you don't want to. All important communications from the OU are sent via email, on StudentHome or on your module website, so you won't miss these if you choose not to use it.

The following social media accounts are official ones run by OU staff:

- Facebook: [The OU](#)
- Twitter: [@OpenUniversity](#)
- LinkedIn: [The Open University](#)
- Instagram: [theopenuniversity](#)

The OU Students Association are also active on social media:

- Twitter [@OUstudents](#)
- Facebook: [OU Students Association](#)

Also check out the OU Library:

- Facebook: [The Open University Library](#)
- Twitter: [@OULibrary](#)

For Careers and Employability Services:

- Twitter: [@OpenUniCareers](#)
- Facebook: [The Open University – Careers and Employability](#)

And OpenLearn:

- Twitter: [@OuFreeLearning](#)
- Facebook: [OpenLearn](#)

You may also find your subject area or faculty have their own official social media accounts.

Many students also set up their own social media groups – you'll probably find that one gets set up for each module you study. These can be a great place to get to know other students, share ideas and support one another.

However, you need to remember that these groups are not moderated by OU staff and this means there are various risks associated with them. The next activity considers these risks.

Activity 4 Information on social media

Allow about 10 minutes

Imagine that you have started studying your first module and your first tutor-marked assignment (the OU calls this a TMA) is due soon. You've joined a Facebook group set

up by another student in your tutor group and go on it to have a look at what other students are saying about the TMA. Another student has posted the following message in the group:

Annabelle Lyama
22hrs - Dublin

TMA word count is 1500 words – I've studied at Uni before and you're always allowed to be 15% over or under the word count, and even then they don't really check, so it doesn't matter if you're up to about 1800 words – the more you write the better the chance of getting a good mark I reckon!

5 Comments

Like Comment

Figure 2 A sample post in a Facebook group

What would you do as a result of reading this information?

Make some notes here.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

This student would have meant well but unfortunately the information is not correct. You can't assume that all universities follow the same rules for things like word counts. What the student said could have been right but you'd need to check the assignment guidance or with your tutor to be sure.

The important point to remember is that you should always look at official OU sources for important information like this, rather than trusting the word of your fellow students, however well intended. This is one reason why the tutor group forums and other OU forum spaces (explored in Session 4) are so useful – they allow you to chat with your fellow students but your tutor or another member of staff is always keeping an eye on what's being said and can correct anything that might send you down the wrong track.

You might want to use social media spaces to socialise, but try and keep chat about assignments and understanding study topics in the tutor group forum. In unmoderated social media spaces there's no one to reliably correct misinformation so it can spread quickly.

It's easy to read something online and take it as fact. The activity you've just done relates to an important digital skill you'll need to develop as a student – assessing the reliability of information. There's a lot of information out there online and you need to be mindful that anyone can publish material so not everything is true. As a student you'll learn to question the reliability and motivations behind materials you come across.

There are also other risks associated with using unmoderated social media spaces, such as risks to your privacy and potential for bullying and harassment. There are measures you can take to protect yourself, and digital skills resources can help you do this. You'll look at these in Session 6. The OU also has a [policy for students using social media](#).

Although you do need to be mindful of the risks, using social media can also enhance your learning. So, let's look at this more positive side in the next brief section.

5.2 Using social media for learning

Social networking offers opportunities to connect with other learners and experts in your chosen subject(s) from all over the world. Now this has been made far easier with all the different social media platforms.

Organisations representing different academic fields have their own social media accounts. You can follow what's happening at the Institute of Physics, the Royal Academy of Arts, the Nursing and Midwifery Council or British Psychological Society and many more. When you've got a moment see what you can find out there that is of interest to you. For now though, if you'd like to, try Twitter in this final activity of the session and start to engage with the OU community.

Activity 5 Using Twitter (optional)

Allow about 10 minutes

This activity is just for fun. Twitter is a social media channel that allows you to share learning and engage with the wider educational community. Short messages can be written and shared easily. If you have a Twitter account use that. If you don't yet have one, it's free and very straightforward to set up.

Your task is to compose a tweet in which you write about what you are looking forward to as a distance learner.

Tweet your message to the OpenLearn account @OUFreeLearning, using this hashtag: **#BeinganOUstudent**

Discussion

By sending a Tweet like this you're using digital skills, you're sharing content and have made a start at engaging with an online community to support your learning.

This brings you to the end of this session. Find out what what's coming up in the next session in the summary.

6 Summary of Session 3

You should now be able to:

- understand who to contact in the OU in different situations
- access support that you might need
- join in with OU community as you want to
- understand how the OU uses social media.

In the next session you'll explore distance learning in more detail, find out about tutorials and how you'll interact with students and OU staff online as well as finding out more about how your learning will be assessed.

You can now go to Session 4.

Session 4: How will I learn?

Introduction

In this session you'll find out about modules and how these fit with qualifications as well as how modules generally work. You'll also explore the benefits and challenges of distance and online study and get some useful tips about how to cope with the challenges.

You'll then turn your attention to tutorials, online forums and how assessment works at the OU.



By the end of this session, you'll be able to:

- understand how modules and qualifications fit together
- know what kind of resources and activities to expect in your module(s)
- book a tutorial and understand the different ways these are presented
- understand how to use forums
- understand assessment and good academic practice at the OU.

1 Modules and qualifications

Modules are the building blocks of your study. They focus on specific areas and specific skills.

They are available at different levels:

1. Access – to prepare for studying
2. Undergraduate – OU levels 1, 2 and 3 (equivalent to levels 4, 5 and 6 at other UK universities)
3. Postgraduate – study beyond undergraduate level.

You can study modules on a standalone basis, or build them towards a recognised qualification.

If you are a new student studying a qualification you'll normally start at OU level 1, and then, if you wish to, progress to OU level 2 before completing your studies at OU level 3.

OU level 1 modules give you a general grounding in your chosen subject, so the content is meant to be quite broad. They introduce the key skills and knowledge you'll need to succeed in your chosen subject area. This usually includes study skills – all to help you become a successful distance learner.

At OU levels 2 and 3 you'll have more opportunities to specialise in topics that interest you, building on what you learned at OU level 1.

Now let's take a look at what to expect from a module.

2 What's in a module?

For each module you'll have access to a range of resources specific to that module.

Exactly what resources you'll get depends on what you're studying. Different modules will have different ways of presenting the content depending on the subject area.

On most modules you'll have the following.

A module website with a study planner

The OU has a standard format for module websites so as you move between modules, the structure of the module websites will feel familiar.

Central to your module website is the study planner showing you what to do when. It's a good idea to keep up with this so you keep on track to complete your assignments on time and can discuss module content with your tutor and other students as you work through together.

The screenshot shows the B100-17J module website. At the top, there are navigation links for Home, Assessment, Tutorials, Forums, Resources, News, Help, and a search bar. Below the navigation, there's a banner with a construction site image and the text 'B100 17J An introduction to business and management'. A progress bar indicates 0% completion. Below the banner, there are two tabs: 'Current weeks' (selected) and 'All weeks'. To the right of the tabs is a 'EXPAND ALL' button. The main content area is titled 'Study Planner' and lists four weeks of activities:

WEEK	Activity	Status
1	Block 1 Introduction 7-13 October	0 of 4 completed
2	Block 1 Introduction, continued 14-20 October	0 of 1 completed
3	Block 1 Introduction, continued 21-27 October	0 of 1 completed
4	Block 1 Introduction, continued and TMA week 28 October – 3 November	0 of 3 completed

To the right of the study planner, there are several sidebar sections: 'Tutor' (with an anonymous contact link), 'News' (with a dropdown menu), 'Recent activity' (listing 'Welcome Forum and Cafe' and 'Welcome forum archive'), and 'OU Anywhere' (with a note about the app). There's also a message at the bottom stating 'Your app doesn't show this website.'

Figure 1 An example of a study planner

Physical materials

On some modules you'll receive physical materials that are delivered to your door.

The physical materials can include books, DVDs, memory sticks and audio CDs.

If you have declared a disability to us and need to have your materials printed in a specific format, for example on coloured paper or with a comb binding, then you can contact your student support team (SST) to arrange this.



Figure 2 Physical materials

A tutor

On most modules you'll have a tutor – you heard from a tutor in Session 3. They will support you during the module, run face-to-face and/or online tutorials, look after your tutor group's forum and provide you with feedback on your assignments. They are your first point of contact for anything to do with the module content.



Figure 3 A tutor

A tutor group

You'll normally be part of a group of students (typically 15 to 25 students) supported by the same tutor. Interaction with your tutor group varies depending on the module, but you usually have a tutor group forum where you can discuss ideas online. You may also meet and work with members of your tutor group and other tutor groups at tutorials – either face to face or online.

Tutorials

On many modules you will have the opportunity to attend tutorials. These are study sessions to support your learning and are led by one or more tutors. You may have the option to attend face-to-face tutorials at venues local to you, and there will usually be

options to attend online versions as well. You'll look at tutorials on more detail in the next section.

Some modules also have day schools, which are longer tutorials.

Forums

These are online discussion areas where you can interact with other students. They are moderated by OU staff. The forums could be specific to your tutor group, include students from several different tutor groups or could be module wide. You'll find these on your module website. You will also find additional wider forums for students studying your subject or qualification on your Study website. On most modules participation in the forums is optional but sometimes there are activities where participation counts towards an assignment. You'll be clearly told if this is the case.

Assessment

You'll need to complete assessments as part of your module. Assessments at the OU come in a variety of formats, the most common being tutor-marked assignments (which we call TMAs) and some modules also have a final piece of work – either a longer assignment or an exam. There is more information about different types of assessment later in this session.

If you're on the move a lot or want to work offline then there is an option to help you with this – the OU Anywhere app.

2.1 OU Anywhere app

If your module has printed materials the OU anywhere app allows you to download ebook versions of your printed textbooks, as well as the audio-visual materials that are provided to you on CD and DVD.

You can find out more about OU Anywhere by searching for it in the [Computing Guide](#).

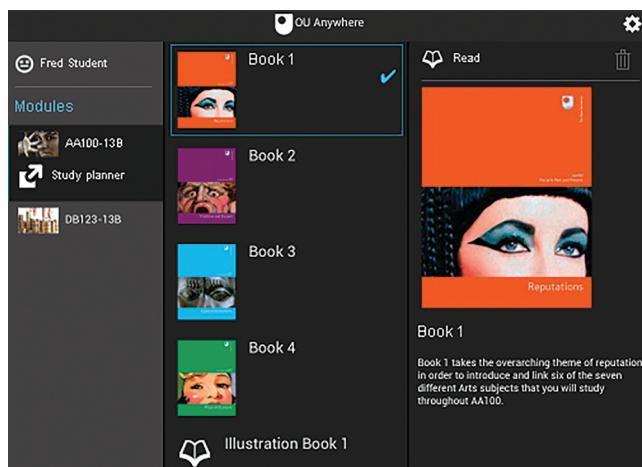


Figure 4 The OU Anywhere app

Next, you'll look in more detail at tutorials.

3 Tutorials

Tutorials can really enhance and support your learning, so it is strongly recommend that you take part. Students also usually find them an enjoyable experience.

At the OU you have the option to join tutorials online and many modules also offer face-to-face options. The aim is to offer you flexibility in how and when you attend tutorials, so as many students can take part as possible.

This section will take you through the purpose and benefits of tutorials and how to book on and attend both online and face to face tutorials.

What are tutorials for?

Tutorials are to help you deepen your understanding of your module material and practise applying your knowledge. If you find something confusing, or can't see how it links to other parts of the module, a tutorial is also the ideal place to resolve that. You may get some useful tips on how to approach assessments too.

Tutorials also give you a chance to connect with other OU students and to engage with a tutor and benefit from their expertise.

Joining tutorials will help you engage actively with your module material. Being actively engaged is crucial in really getting to grips with your subject, and helps you remember it too.

The best people to tell you about tutorials are the people who have experience of them. In the following video, a lecturer, student and tutor discuss the benefits.

Video content is not available in this format.



Some students worry about whether it's OK to go to a tutorial if they're a bit behind. Yes, it is! It's always OK to go to a tutorial. And you may well find that going helps you catch up, and gets your motivation going again. If you find something hard, or aren't getting quite

the marks you want, you most definitely should go! Tutorials are a great opportunity to ask questions and get advice.

Always remember – the purpose of the tutorial is to help and support you.

3.1 What happens at tutorials?

Here are some of the things that may happen at tutorials. The balance will depend on your subject, how far through the module you are, and, of course, the tutor.

- Discussion about the module material with opportunities to ask questions
- Activities designed to enhance your understanding of the material
- Working on problems or having discussions in small groups
- Help and guidance on how to approach assessment
- Learning points from the last assessment
- Introduction of different approaches to the module material to help you make links and develop your grasp of the subject as a whole
- ...and usually the chance to chat informally with other students and tutors

If you have a particular concern about how things will work at a tutorial, then do contact your tutor beforehand – they should be able to reassure you.

Arranging to go to tutorials

You choose which tutorials to attend and do this by booking them online. There is usually a choice of dates and venues and always an option to attend an online tutorial. You're welcome to sign up for any of the tutorials shown. Some modules only offer online tutorials.

The choice of whether you attend an online tutorial or face-to-face is yours. Join both if you like – sometimes hearing more than one tutor's take on things is really helpful.

In the next couple of sections you'll find out more about what it's actually like to take part in online and face-to-face tutorials.

3.2 Online tutorials

Online tutorials will take place in our online rooms, using software called Adobe Connect. You can think of these as virtual meeting rooms, where you can talk (by voice or text) to other students and tutors, and see material shared by the tutor, have a go at online polls, contribute your thoughts and ideas in discussions and sometimes work in small groups with other students.

The functions in Adobe Connect and the way you'll book onto tutorials will be the same for each module.

Many modules will record tutorials just in case you're unable to attend any of the options, or if you want to revisit them later to help refresh your memory or when you are revising. You'll find information on your module website about how to access these recordings.

It's always better to attend tutorials live if you possibly can. You learn most when you're actively engaging with what's going on – and that is much easier to do when there are

other students and your tutor in there with you at the same time. Being able to ask questions and join in makes a lot of difference!

If you're only able to use a recording, then you can still try to 'join in' as far as possible – when the students in the tutorial are asked to answer a question, have a go at it too (try pausing it while you think). Likewise, if there's a discussion, have a think what your view would be before reading or listening to what other people have said. If there's a presentation, think what questions you might like to ask, and get in touch with your tutor to ask them if they're not covered in the recording.

In the following video, two students talk about what it's like to take part in an online tutorial.

Video content is not available in this format.



You can start to get familiar with Adobe Connect in the next activity.

Activity 1 Using Adobe Connect

Allow about 10 minutes

While Adobe Connect is fairly intuitive, it's useful to be familiar with it before your first tutorial.

You may find that there are demonstration tutorials at the start of your first module, so look out for these, but for now take a look at the [Computing Guide](#).

Once you're in the Computing Guide you'll see a heading part way down the page called 'Tutorials (Online rooms)' and under this there is a link to the guidance for using Adobe Connect.

Tutorials (Online rooms)

Online rooms allow you to talk live over the internet to your tutor and other students from your module, in real time, using text chat, audio and video. The University's online rooms are accessed through Adobe Connect.

[Online rooms guidance](#)

Figure 5 Online tutorials

Take a look at the links under 'User information' (the information for hosts is for your tutor). You might want to save a link to this page in case you do have any problems using Adobe Connect.

User information

This guidance is relevant to all online room users. By default all students enter a room as 'Participants', this gives you basic functionality within a room.

 [Online rooms – familiarisation video](#)

 [Online rooms user guide](#)

 [Adobe Connect quick start user guide](#)

 [Adobe Connect features for participants](#)

This matrix is a quick reference to all the features available to Participants using a computer and mobile device, as well as in breakout rooms.

Figure 6 Adobe Connect guidance

3.3 Face-to-face tutorials

Face-to-face tutorials take place at various locations around the UK.

Some modules will have tutorials available in more locations than others – this is due to the number of students who are enrolled to study that module who live in that area.

Although it may feel frustrating if tutorials are not very local to you, remember if it's not possible for you to travel to one, you'll have online alternatives available.

Tutorials usually last 2–3 hours, and sometimes there are longer sessions, usually called day-schools.

The details of the location, along with parking and other access information, are provided on the tutorial booking page. You'll need to make your own travel arrangements. You should try to arrive about 10 minutes before the tutorial start time, so that you can get settled and the tutorial can get going on time. It's worth checking the details of the venue to see if there are any shops nearby or a drinks machine on the premises, so you can bring any refreshments if you need to.

Do remember it's not like a formal lesson at school! No need to worry about what you wear – just be comfortable. And you're not there to be tested!

It's a good idea to have some of your study materials with you. Your tutor will usually tell you which ones to bring. Also bring pens, paper, and for some subjects, a calculator. If you have a tablet or smartphone, it may be helpful to bring that too.

Watch two students talk about their experiences of attending tutorials in the following video.

Video content is not available in this format.



Activity 2 Booking tutorials

Allow about 10 minutes

You can only complete this activity when your tutorials list has been issued.

If you're completing this course more than three weeks before the start date of your module, skip this for now and make a note to come back later and check for tutorials. You will also get an email to prompt you to book.

Go to your module website and click the 'Tutorials' tab at the top. If your tutorials list has been issued you'll see it here. It is usually available around three weeks before the start date of your module, but don't panic if it's not there yet as sometimes they take a little longer to be confirmed. Do contact your SST if your module start date has passed and you still have no tutorials.

Identify which of the tutorials you're likely to want to attend.

If you're reasonably confident you'll be attending, then book a place.

Remember, you can always review and change your booking (assuming there's room) at a future date.

Tutorials for TM129

Here is the list of tutorials for TM129, none of which are compulsory. Use the tutorial planner below to book your tutorials.

Tutorial	Availability	Status
Linux/TMA03 Planning for the EMA	9 July 2018 - 4 August 2018 11 August 2018 - 8 September 2018	Select dates

Need help?
See the [Help Centre](#) if you need help booking tutorials. You can also contact your [Student Support Team](#).

Figure 7 Information on tutorials

Another way of interacting with other students and OU staff, such as your tutor, are the various forums. These are the subject of the next section.

4 How do forums work?

Forums are online spaces where you can chat to your fellow students, ask questions and get information from your tutor. They can also be used for more formal group discussions and activities.

Watch this video explaining the forums page on your module website.

Video content is not available in this format.

Forum	Unread discussions	Last post	Location
Welcome forum		5/10/16, 16:59	
Study forum	1	20/03/17, 12:22	

Forum	Unread discussions	Last post	Location
Week 1 forum	1	15/03/17, 12:18	Week 1
Module forum: Live debate		15/03/17, 12:18	Week 19

There are three main forum types you are likely to encounter:

Tutor group forum

The tutor group forum is just for you and the rest of your tutor group.

How the forum is used will depend on the individual module. On some modules it will be used for discussion of module content and activities. Your tutor will usually start any formal discussions or activities.

Your tutor may also use this forum to share information with you, such as tutorial notes.

Module-wide forum

The module-wide forum is available to everyone registered on the module, and all OU staff with a connection to the module.

It usually opens before the tutor group forum and is a good place to get early questions answered and get in touch with other students. The forum is looked after by tutors or a member of the module team.

Qualification/Subject forums

On your Study website you'll also find a forum space that all students studying, or interested in studying your qualification or subject area can post in. Bear in mind that anything you post here can be read by a lot of people, but they are a good place to speak to other students and discuss topics outside of your module content.

These forums are open all year round. As part of your subject induction, which you'll be directed to at the end of this course, you'll be shown to your Study website where you'll find this forum space and can start talking to other students and ask questions.

The next activity gives you a chance to learn a bit more about how to use forums.

Activity 3 How to use a forum

Allow about 20 minutes

Go to the [How to use a forum](#) section of the Computing Guide.

There's a lot of information in this section of the Computing Guide, so for now focus on the following to familiarise yourself with how OU forums work:

- Join a discussion
- Create a discussion
- Reply to a post
- Edit posts
- Delete post or discussion

Now complete the following short quiz on forums.

How long after posting in a forum are you able to edit your post?

- 24 hours
- 5 minutes
- 30 minutes
- You can edit at anytime.

Which of the following statements about archived forum threads are correct?

- Once archived students can read the discussion but cannot add to it.
- Once archived students can no longer access discussion.
- Once archived students can carry on contributing to the discussion.

Which of these are students able to do when contributing to a discussion?

- Delete a post from another student they don't like.
- Include YouTube videos in the message.
- Include images in the message.
- Add documents to the message.
- Start a new discussion thread.
- Edit another student's post.

Are these statements true or false?

Taking part in all forums is compulsory.

- False
- True

All forums in the module are purely optional and there are no penalties for taking part in any forum.

- False
- True

Some modules award marks for sufficient forum participation.

- True
- False

We want you to make the most of opportunities to work with other students, such as forums and tutorials. Whenever you work with others, however, it's always important to be mindful of your safety and that of those you're working with. You'll consider this briefly in the next section.

5 Safeguarding

The majority of OU forums are moderated and any inappropriate comments will be deleted. The general rules to follow are being polite and courteous in posts and avoiding posts that you are not suitable for our small number of students who are aged under 18. It's very rare to encounter any problems in OU forums or tutorials. However, the OU does have a safeguarding team you can contact if you have any concerns about anything another student or anybody involved with the OU says or does. You can contact the safeguarding team by email: safeguarding-referrals@open.ac.uk.

Prevent (Counter-Terrorism) Duty

As a higher education institution, the OU has an important role in providing appropriate platforms to challenge extremist views and ideologies through the provision of learning and research and the protection of academic freedom and promotion of free speech, debate and liberal values. Preventing people from being drawn into terrorism is synonymous with our concern for student and staff welfare and wellbeing.

If you, at any point in your studies, believe that you are being targeted in any way to be drawn into extremism or being radicalised, or you observe this occurring in any OU environment, we have a dedicated Prevent Co-ordinator you can contact for confidential advice on how to deal with the matter.

If you wish to, find out more about the [OU Prevent Principles](#) and how to contact the OU Prevent Co-ordinator.

6 Assessment

There are three main reasons why your work is assessed:

- To show you and your tutor how well you've developed the knowledge and skills taught in the module. It also helps your tutor see what support you might need.
- To learn from your tutor's feedback on your assignments in order to see what you've done well and what you might need to improve.
- To demonstrate to the University that you've met the requirements of the module by completing all the compulsory assessment tasks and achieving a minimum mark to pass.

The following are the main types of assessment you may encounter at the OU. If your module website is open you can look in the 'Assessment' section to see what assessments you have.

TMAs (tutor-marked assignments)

Tutor-marked assignments are spread across the study time for your module. You will be given time in your study planner to prepare your TMA, and guidance to help you. Your allocated tutor will provide feedback and a mark for TMAs. Tutors use detailed marking guidelines to ensure consistency. Your tutor will return your marked TMA with feedback that will help you focus on areas to develop for future work.

iCMAs (interactive computer-marked assignments)

Modules may also use iCMAs as part of assessment. As with TMAs they are designed to help you learn. Many of them give you instant feedback, and if you haven't answered the question correctly you may also be given the chance to try again.

If your module uses iCMAs you will be able to locate them in the Assessment section on your module website.

EMAs (end-of-module assessments)

Some modules have an end-of-module assessment (EMA). This is a larger assignment you do at the end of a module and is completed and submitted in a similar way to TMAs but brings together what you've learned across the module and is in place of an exam.

Exams

Exams also take place at the end of a module. Not all modules have exams and modules will never have both an EMA and an exam.

If and when you do have an exam there is plenty of support available. For example, there's lots of information and advice on the Help Centre about exams, from tips on revision and techniques to the practical arrangements.

You'll get the specific date, time and location of an exam around 12 weeks before the exam date on your module record page. If you need to take your exam in a different location you can request this, but you need to do it quickly.

If you have declared a disability to the University, we'll be able to make adjustments and special arrangements if you require them. You need to contact us a few months in advance to make sure this can be organised in time.

The Assessment Handbook

You'll get more information about assessment requirements when you start your module, so you don't need to worry too much about the detail now. [The Assessment Handbook](#) covers all the rules and policies relevant to assessment at The Open University and is a really useful resource for all things assessment – you might want to bookmark a link to this.

6.1 How will I submit assignments?

You'll usually submit TMAs and EMAs using the OU's online eTMA (electronic tutor-marked assignment) system, although some modules allow you to submit assignments on paper. Your module materials tell you which submission method to use.

You can access the eTMA system from your module record page on StudentHome.

You can practise using the eTMA system before your first assignment is due by sending a 'dummy' document. This is also known as TMA00 and a button for this should appear seven days before your module starts. You may find your tutor asks you to do this as a practice.

Submitting a TMA is quick and easy to do. Just remember to follow the guidance you'll be given on how to format and submit your file.

As well as submitting your assignments, you might be wondering how you get the feedback on your work.

6.2 How will I get feedback on assignments?

If you submitted your TMA online you'll receive an email telling you when it's available to download. We call this 'collecting' your marked assignment. Typically, you'll get it back within 10 working days from your submission deadline.

To collect your TMA you'll go back to the eTMA system. Here you should see your score for the TMA and a button to collect it.

When you click 'collect' you'll be able to download your TMA and tutor feedback as a zip file which you'll need to save to your computer or device. When you open the file you'll find your tutor's comments and feedback.

Do make sure that you collect your work and read all of the feedback – there is usually feedback on your TMA document as well as an attached form with a summary of the feedback. Don't just look at the mark, as the feedback you get is really important and will help you improve.

Again, you can see how all of this works if you submit TMA00, as you can collect this just like a real TMA.

Before finishing this session you'll take a quick look at an important academic skill:
referencing.

7 What is referencing and why is it important?

Referencing is the way you acknowledge other people's work when you use it in your assignment or research. This is also known as good academic practice.

Referencing is important because:

- it shows you have read around the subject
- your academic argument will be stronger if it's supported by evidence from other people's research
- others will be able to find and use your sources, which in turn allows them to check the validity and authenticity of your work, as well as develop and enhance their own understanding of the subject.

If you're starting your studies at OU level 1 you may find that you're not expected to start referencing straightaway. You will, however, be helped to develop this skill as you progress through your studies and learn when, where and what you need to reference.

What you *don't* need to reference are your own thoughts and ideas or anything that constitutes common knowledge, such as the capital city of Scotland.

Good academic practice is about referencing every time you use the work of others in your own work. This is not confined to quoting or summarising material in your own words but also using data or ideas. Knowing how to acknowledge sources you've used will also help you in the workplace, for example when compiling reports or presentations.

The OU's usual referencing style is based upon the Harvard system. However, some subjects use different styles. You need to be particularly mindful of this if you're planning to study a mixture of different subjects and make sure you check the referencing style for each module.

Learn more about referencing styles in the next activity.

Activity 4 Referencing styles at the OU

Allow about 5 minutes

Search for 'referencing and plagiarism' in the Help Centre.

You might like to save any useful pages you find in the Help Centre (see Session 2, Section 4 for how to do this), or bookmark them in your web browser, so you can quickly find the style guides commonly used in OU modules when you start studying.

Discussion

If you didn't find it, the following page ()contains links out to the different referencing styles used at the OU so is a useful link to save: [Referencing and plagiarism](#).

Developing good referencing skills can help with the issue of plagiarism. Let's take a brief look at that now.

7.1 What is plagiarism?



Figure 8 Plagiarism

Plagiarism is using someone else's work and making it appear to be your own. This includes using someone else's exact words (or paraphrasing it) in your work *without* acknowledging the original source, with a reference. If you acknowledge your sources correctly, you will avoid this issue.

Watch this short animation where Bob talks about plagiarism.

Video content is not available in this format.



Another part of avoiding plagiarism is writing in your own words. This means describing and explaining something yourself, and not using the words of someone else. This has the added benefit of helping you to learn.

Listen to a short recording about this now.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Finally, remember that you should never share your assessed work on any university forum or network external to the OU. University regulations state that all information in assignments is confidential, and sharing is regarded as a very serious matter.

8 Summary of Session 4

You should now be able to:

- understand how modules build towards a qualification
- know what resources and activities are likely to be available on your module
- understand the purpose of tutorials and how you can engage with them
- start to use forums
- understand assessment at the OU and what good academic practice is.

In the next session you'll look at planning your time, getting some tips from other students and also learn about the benefits of keeping a study journal.

You can now go to Session 5.

Session 5: How can I be a successful student?

Introduction

In this session you'll start thinking about how you'll get the most out of the OU, including how you'll manage your time. You'll also hear advice from other students about what has been successful for them, and find out about study journals.



By the end of this session, you'll be able to:

- understand the purpose of a study journal
- understand the benefits and challenges of distance learning
- think about things you can do to learn effectively
- start to plan your time
- know what to do if you fall behind.

1 Keeping a study journal

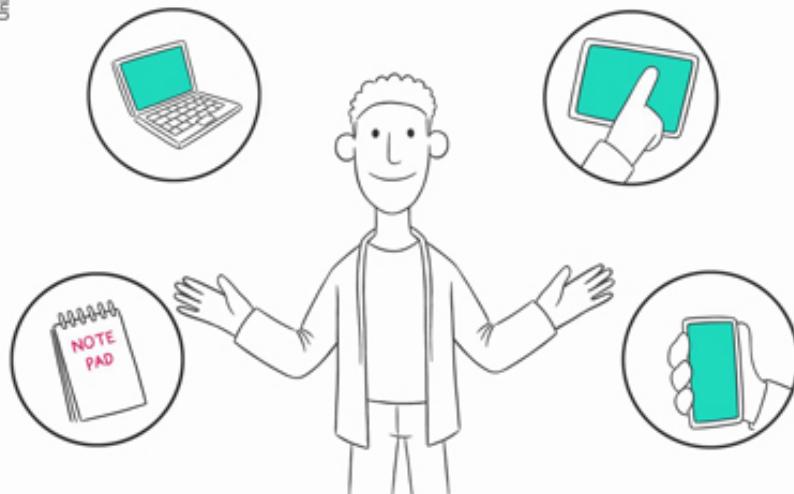
Throughout your studies at the OU, and especially while you're new, you'll be taking on lots of information, continually developing more skills and, at times, maybe facing challenges.

One way to keep on top of all of this is to keep a study journal. If you've been taking any notes while working through this course you've already got the makings of your own study journal.

A study journal is just a formal term used to describe your personal notes. Watch the following video about how a study journal works and its benefits.

Video content is not available in this format.

[What is a study journal?](#)



If you haven't already, you might like to start making some notes in this session.

You'll find you need to take notes in some form when you start your studies, for example notes on different topics you are studying or notes when you plan an assignment, so it's good to get in the habit now. If you find it useful you might wish to continue using a specific study journal just to reflect on your learning through your studies or you could do it as part of your other notes. There's no right or wrong way – do what works for you.

Here are a few methods you could use to keep your journal:

- a document on your PC or mobile device
- a digital notebook, such as One Note
- a blog/journal.

You can, of course, also take paper notes. Many students find that doing this helps them absorb information better. It's also worth setting something up on your computer, however, as you might want to save useful web links you come across.

Keeping a study journal can help with making a success of distance learning. In the next section you'll look at some more tips to guide you on your way.

2 What do I need to know about distance learning?

Distance learning is probably different from how you have learned in the past. There are many real benefits to be had but, as with most things in life, also some challenges. This isn't meant to make you anxious. It's just useful to understand what these might be before you start, that way you can think about how you'll address possible challenges.



Figure 1 Pros and cons

Here are some of the pros and cons.

Pro: You can study at a pace and time to suit you

As an OU student you're not tied to a rigid timetable of lectures and events. So you can fit your learning around your other commitments. There are still deadlines to meet. You'll have strict cut-off dates for assignments but how and when you work to meet them is up to you.

Pro: You decide where and when you study

Students have a wide variety of approaches to study. You might get up early and study, or study on the train on the way to work. You could study with your headphones on while the family is watching TV or stay on at work for an extra couple of hours where it is quiet and use that time.

Libraries, kitchens, bedrooms, sheds, cars, trains, gardens... the list of places you can study is endless. You can potentially make any space a learning space.

Pro: Working while you learn

Many OU students are working at the same time they are studying. If the module you're studying is relevant to your job, then this opportunity to practise what you learn is really valuable.

Con: Feeling alone

Studying at a distance may make you feel separate from your fellow students and the university. However, as you've seen already there are lots of people you can talk to for support. You'll also have lots of opportunities to interact with other students, for example in your tutor group forum and at tutorials, so try and get involved in these. There are also lots of social media spaces where you can meet other people – many students form local

study groups and also meet up in person. The OU Students' Association also offers a range of activities and events you can take part in.

Interacting with other students is your choice – while we encourage you to take part in tutorials, the amount of social interaction you have is entirely up to you.

Con: Self-motivation

This can be a challenge but is also one of the key skills you'll develop and demonstrate through studying with the OU. Your tutor is there to help with and support your learning. They don't stand over you like teachers at school to make sure you are completing everything. This means that you need to be able to motivate yourself to get your work done and assignments submitted. At times this can be challenging but reaching out to your fellow students and tutor for support may help you stay motivated. It can also be useful to remind yourself why you wanted to study in the first place: remember your personal goals. Why did you start on the journey?

Con: You will need to tell your tutor if you need help

Because your tutor doesn't see you every week, you need to let them know if you're struggling. The secret is to be proactive and talk to your tutor or your student support teams (SST) as soon as you feel you're struggling or have an issue. They are experts at helping you find ways to overcome difficulties with your studies – whether large or small.

We asked some students to think about the pros and cons of distance learning. Some filmed themselves and sent us their films; others were interviewed at a Students' Association conference. Watch this video to hear what they thought.

Video content is not available in this format.

[The pros and cons of OU study](#)



Although there may be some challenges to distance learning there are also strategies that can help you. You'll get some more tips to guide you on your way in the next section.

3 How can I succeed at distance learning?

What does it take to be a successful distance learning student? There are many strategies you can use, but there are some common aspects which are most likely to help you succeed.

Number 1: Have a plan

There is a famous quote, usually attributed to Benjamin Franklin: 'If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.'

This is so true when thinking about studying. If there are no set plans in your timetable for studying then it's not likely to happen. We're not saying that you can't take advantage of quiet times and unexpected opportunities to study, but you shouldn't make that your primary strategy.

Things change and plans must adapt, but you have to have a plan in order to be able to adapt it.



Figure 2

Number 2: Find your study space

Successful students often have a particular place for study that works for them, and it's not always the obvious ones.

On the sofa, in the office after hours, in the kitchen, in a child's bedroom while they are at school, in the car, in the local library, on the bed with course work spread around. These are all places students have said they prefer to study. There is no right or wrong here. The only 'right' is that you feel comfortable and able to learn.



Figure 3

Number 3: Make effective notes

There are numerous ways of taking notes and absorbing material effectively. Just reading the material over and over again is not usually very effective. There's no 'one size fits all' approach here and it will probably take some trial and error to find what works for you. Once you find your preferred way, the whole area of study becomes easier.



Figure 4

Number 4: Get involved and take part

Students who perform the best tend to be the ones who get involved fully in the forums, join in with the tutorials and keep in contact with their tutors. Feedback from student surveys definitely suggests that getting involved makes studying easier and more successful.

It's probably a combination of different things:

- Discussing issues with other students helps you to consolidate and store information.
- Being able to correct misinterpretations early on helps to save time wasted by going in the wrong direction.
- Seeing the importance and emphasis other students put on different parts of the material helps you to reassess your views and gives you another perspective.



Figure 5

Our number 1 pointer was planning your time. Let's look at this in some more detail now.

4 Planning your time

When you enrolled with the OU you might have thought about how much time you have available for study and you also looked briefly at time management in Session 1 of this course.

You've now had a taste of studying by doing this course, so now is a good time to consider how you'll manage your time going forward.

You'll probably have noticed that the activities in this course have suggested timings – how closely have you stuck to these? Have you generally needed more or less than the suggested time to complete an activity? This might give you an indication of whether you typically need more or less time than the suggested amount. Perhaps you have occasionally done more than you needed to? This can be quite easy – so try and remind yourself to stay with the task set.

As mentioned previously, you'll find you work through some activities quicker than others, but it's worth considering whether you're someone who likes to take their time or who typically works quickly. It's really important to note that your module will be more academically demanding than this course, so will require more time and concentration, so don't be lulled into a false sense of security if you've found this quick and easy. Thinking about how you've managed your time on this course is still a useful guide though.

Activity 1 Planning your time

Allow about 20 minutes

On our website where you might have browsed courses and signed up to study there is a [time planner activity](#). Open it in a new tab or window.

Please note that if you live outside of the UK you will not be able to access this activity as it is on a website for students resident in the UK. There is an alternative [time planner in the Help Centre](#) you can use – it's not as detailed but you can still use it to plan your time.

You may have already used the time planner before you registered to study and if so you may have saved your answers. If this is the case we'd still like you to revisit it and make sure you are happy with your original answers.

If you haven't already used this planner then work through it – setting up what times you wake up and go to bed, how much time you spend on other activities and what times you plan to study.

Click 'View your results' to see how much time you have available for study.

As a reminder, you need:

- 16–18 hours for each 60 credit module
- 14 hours for each 30 credit module if it runs over 22 weeks
- 8–9 hours for each 30 credit module if it runs over 30 weeks

If the planner is saying you don't have enough time to study 60 credits then you'll need to consider how you'll find additional time for study. You'll find some tips on the time planner activity.

If you're planning to study more than 60 credits at once and it doesn't look like you're going to have enough time you might want to consider reducing the number of modules you're starting with.

If you would like change your study plans or are really concerned about finding time to study you can [contact your student support team \(SST\)](#).

We all struggle to find enough time sometimes, and the next section will give you ideas for successful time management.

4.1 Time management strategies

As with study tips there are also many ways to manage your time. Here are some students sharing their time management experiences and strategies.

Video content is not available in this format.



Are there any tips you think you could use?

Activity 2 Developing time management skills

Allow about 20 minutes

Read through this article from the Help Centre which is focused on [developing your time management skills](#).

As you go through, make a notes of some of the things you'll try when you start your studies. You might also want to save this article in the Help Centre (see Session 2, Activity 5).

Even with the best laid plans, things can happen that affect them. This is normal. So, what can you do if you fall behind?

4.2 What can I do if I fall behind?

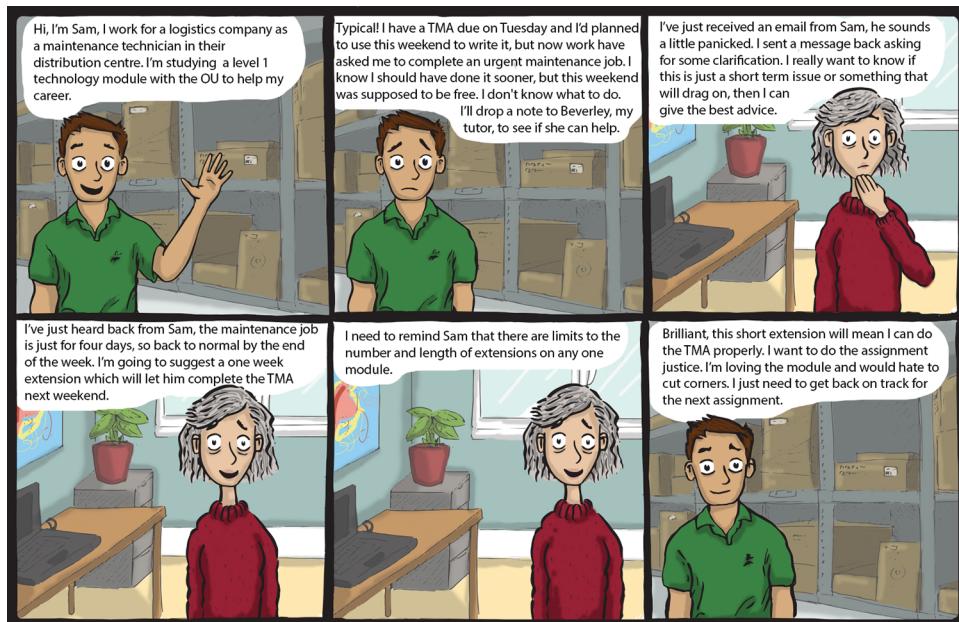
No matter how well you plan, life has a habit of getting in the way so there will probably be times when you'll struggle to keep up with study.

It's important to know where to go when things get tough. Your tutor is your first point of contact – the sooner you tell them about any issues you have, the better – whether it's something happening at home or work that's stopping you from studying, or that you're finding something in the module particularly difficult. They are there to help so don't be afraid to let them know!

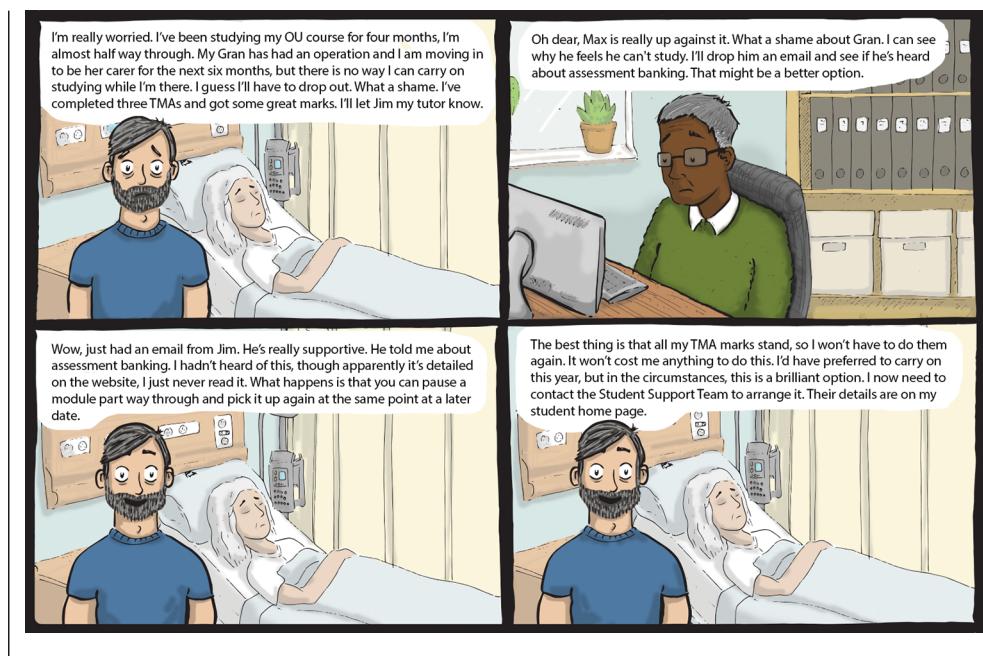
Your student support team (SST) are also an excellent place to go for support. They can offer you a wide range of options to help you get back on track. Your tutor might refer you to them, or you can contact them yourself and they'll work with you on a personalised plan.

The following are fictional examples but are based on situations that students commonly find themselves in.

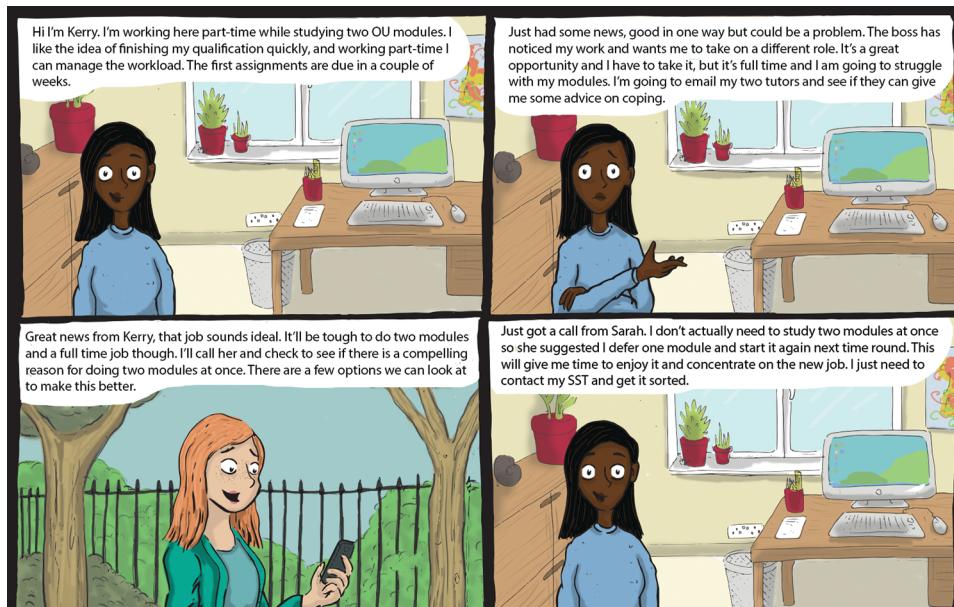
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These are just a couple of examples of the type of help you can get if you fall behind. There are many other options that could be discussed.

The main message to take away is talk to your tutor as soon as possible. If you're thinking you need to stop or pause a module (we call this deferring) you'll also need to talk to your student support team (SST) to make sure you're aware of all the options and any financial implications.

Before you finish this session we've got some final tips from students for you.

5 Top tips from other students

In the video below, students share on the one thing they wish they had known before they started. There are some great tips here to take away.

Video content is not available in this format.



Having considered how you'll manage your time, you might also be thinking about the impact of you studying on those around you. Up next are some tips on how family and friends can contribute to your success.

5.1 Getting your family and friends on board

Having considered how you'll manage your time, you might also be thinking about the impact of studying on those around you. It's a good idea to have a conversation with the people you live with, or others you are close to, so they understand what you're taking on and how they can best support you.

You might want to discuss:

- When you plan to study (perhaps look back together on the time planning activity you did in Activity 1 of this session) - will you need to stop doing anything and could they help you out? For example could a partner or family member take children to classes or activities to give you some time for study? Could someone else take on more household chores?

- Exam and assessment dates – they need to know that you can't move these dates and are likely need to spend more time on your studies at these times. You also need to be careful about clashes with holidays and other events.
- Arrangements for attending tutorials and other events – these usually take place in the evenings or at weekends. If you're attending online tutorials make sure people in your household know you'll need computer access and some peace and quiet.
- Computer access – if you share a computer with others in your household you may need to negotiate times to use it. If your broadband connection is slow or unstable, others might not be able to use the internet while you're attending online tutorials or watching videos as part of your studies.
- Where you'll study – you'll need somewhere to store your notes, books and other study materials (pens, paper etc.) and to actually sit and study. You may need to negotiate with other household members where this space will be.

What else can your family and friends do to help? Everyone is different but here are some ideas:

- Offering to listen if you want to talk about things you've been reading – talking through subjects in your own words helps understanding and learning. Sometimes a 'novice' rather than another student can be the best person to do this with.
- Being patient if you seem distracted or anxious, particularly around exam time or when assignment deadlines are looming. Giving you some space and taking care of household chores and other commitments may help.
- If you have children, offering to take them out for a while so you're not distracted.
- Being understanding and supportive if you're disappointed with a score or grade. Appreciating that your studies matter and you'll be upset is important. They may be able to think of something to do to cheer you up, and be a listening ear if you want to talk it through.
- Sharing your joy when you hit important milestones, for example submitting your first assignment, passing an assignment, completing a module or even simply getting to grips with a tricky topic. Do something nice to celebrate!

Don't forget that you are part of a supportive community of students, tutors and staff. If you find yourself needing some support you can talk to other students in your tutor group forum, through social media or find out about opportunities to meet other students through the OU Students Association. Studying at a distance does not mean you are isolated. Your tutor is also there to support you with the module materials and if you're struggling at all you can always contact your student support team (SST).

6 Summary of Session 5

You should now be able to:

- understand how you might use a study journal
- recognise the benefits and challenges of distance learning
- have some ideas about things you can do to help you study successfully
- have a realistic plan of when you'll study and have ways to manage your time successfully
- understand what to do if you start to fall behind.

In the final session you'll find out what practical steps you can take now to get prepared for study. This includes equipment and computer skills you'll need. You'll also be introduced to the concept of digital skills and explore OpenLearn – the OU's site full of free resources for anyone. At the end of the next session you'll also have a chance to check what you've learned from all six sessions in the end of course quiz. This will also give the chance to earn your badge.

You can now go to Session 6.

Session 6: What do I need to do before I start studying?

Introduction

To get the best out of online and distance study you'll need a basis of skills, knowledge and equipment to do things quickly, easily and with confidence. Getting these in place now will mean you're free to concentrate on the content of your module(s) when it starts.

In this session you'll learn about some of these skills, assess which ones you already have and be pointed to some resources that will help you get prepared while you're waiting to start.

You'll start by looking at what equipment you need to study.



By the end of this session, you'll be able to:

- know what equipment you need
- check your computer skills and get help if you need it
- understand what digital skills are and how you can improve yours
- understand how OpenLearn can help you in your studies.

When you have completed the course we would really appreciate your feedback. If you haven't already done so and if you would like to share your experiences of taking this course, please fill in this [short survey](#).

1 Equipment needed for study

Before the start of your module you need to think about the equipment you'll need.

A computer

You'll need regular access to a laptop or desktop computer to study at the OU – mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones are helpful for when you need to study on the move, but you'll struggle to complete all aspects of your study with them. This is particularly the case for completing assessments.

The computer you use does not usually need to be a high specification. If your computer was bought new within the last six or seven years, it should meet the computing requirements for most modules.

Check the requirements for the module(s) you're planning to study in case there is anything specific you need. If you're studying towards a qualification it's worth searching for it on the [Study at the OU website](#) and looking at the requirements for each module you're planning to study (under 'Technical requirements' in the module description).

If you do need to buy a new computer, many retailers offer educational discounts – which you're entitled to as an OU student. Look back at the student discounts section of this course in Session 1 to find out how to access these.

An internet connection

A lot of the materials and support for OU study are online and in order to join online tutorials you'll need a reasonably fast and reliable connection.

If your internet connection at home is not very good consider whether you can use an internet connection somewhere else (for example a workplace, library or friend's house) when you need to study online or join an online tutorial.

A headset

To fully participate in online tutorials you'll need a headset with a microphone. You might be able to use a built-in microphone if your computer has one but you'll be able to hear, and be heard, more clearly with a headset.

You'll also need a headset to complete spoken assignments – for example if you're planning to study any languages modules.



Figure 1 A headset

Headsets with microphones are available relatively cheaply from technology and general retailers – try to get hold of one before your module starts.

Anything else?

Some modules may require further specific equipment or software. If this is the case then the specific requirements will be in the module description on the [!Warning! inherit not supported Study at the OU](#) website (under 'Technical requirements' in the module description).

1.1 What sort of computer?

If you find you're struggling with what sort of computer you need or require assistance getting it set up for OU study then help is at hand. The OU has a dedicated team of experts on the Computing and Distribution Helpdesk – you heard from them as one of places you can go for support in Session 2.

Opening hours and contact information for the Computing Helpdesk can be found in the [Help Centre](#).

However, before you contact them you may find the answer by searching in the Help Centre or in the Computing Guide.

That's the basic equipment but what about computer skills?

2 Essential computer skills

You'll need a basic level of computing skills to study with the OU and it's important to check before you start studying that you don't have any gaps you need to address.

You may already be a confident computer user but it's still worth checking these so that you get off to the best possible start in your studies.

Do this in following activity.

Activity 1 Assessing your computing skills

Allow about 10 minutes

Complete the following self-assessment activity. Click on the image to get to the activity. You may have completed this before you registered, but it's worth revisiting now you've found out a bit more about OU study.

Please note that if you live outside of the UK you will not be able to access this activity as it is on a website for students resident in the UK. There is, however, lots of information about the skills you will need in the [Help Centre](#).

I can start up and shut down a computer, use a mouse, keyboard (or other equivalent input/output devices).

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I can open a word processing program (like Microsoft Word for windows) and use it to create and save documents.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I can re-open documents and other files that I use or create, such as a letter or a spreadsheet.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I can upload or download files between a computer and the internet.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I can create and organise folders on a computer.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Discussion

If you found you were lacking in any of these basic skills then we strongly recommend you visit this [basic computing skills page](#) in the Help Centre and brush up on the basics.

The Help Centre, the OU Library and the Computing Guide offer a wealth of resources to help you develop your online and computer related skills. So if you're struggling to do something at any point in your studies, remember to check any of these for help.

There is also a wider set of skills relating to using digital devices, such as computers or mobile devices. These are known as digital skills and are the subject of the next section.

3 What are digital skills?

Digital skills are about using technology to achieve your goals, whether those are related to work, everyday life or study.

Digital skills include things like:

- presenting yourself to your best advantage online and managing how you appear online - your digital identity
- making the most of online networks
- knowing who and what to trust online
- evaluating and using online tools
- searching online effectively.

Watch this short animation to understand more about what being digital might mean for you:

Video content is not available in this format.



As illustrated in the animation you're probably already using digital skills in other aspects of your life and can bring these into your studies. Likewise, the digital skills you develop while studying will help you in other places.

Don't worry, however, if you're not used to working digitally – there are plenty of resources available to help you.

What digital skills are needed for study? Find out in the next section.

3.1 Digital skills for study

Watch this video to hear from other students about how they've found working online and what digital skills they use.

Video content is not available in this format.



The Open University



Activity 2 Assessing your digital skills

Allow about 10 minutes

It's useful at this point to think about what your digital skills are like currently.

Answer the following questions honestly to get a good idea of where you might need to develop your skills.

Consider each of the following statements in turn - how confident are you with each one? Add a number between 1 and 5, 1 being 'Not confident at all', 3 being 'I can manage' and 5 being 'Totally confident, I do this regularly'.

Statement	Your answer (1–5)
I know who can see what I put online. I know how public or private the things I share on social media are, and I'm aware of my 'digital footprint'.	<i>Provide your answer...Provide your answer...</i>
I can search for and find information online quickly and easily.	<i>Provide your answer...Provide your answer...</i>
I can judge whether the information I've found is trustworthy and relevant.	<i>Provide your answer...Provide your answer...</i>

I am comfortable using information presented in all sorts of different digital formats e.g. videos, podcasts etc.

Provide your answer...Provide your answer...

I know how to communicate respectfully online (e.g. when adding comments to social media posts or talking to others online).

Provide your answer...Provide your answer...

Discussion

Do any of these skills surprise you? Digital skills cover much more than knowing how to use the different applications on your computer.

The next section will point you to some resources to help develop these skills.

3.2 Developing digital skills

Having done the self-assessment activity, you might have identified some areas where you could improve your digital skills.

Activity 3 Developing your digital skills

Allow about 20 minutes

In Table 1 is a list of OU resources designed to help develop your digital skills.

Pick a couple of topics where you've identified you might need to develop your skills, and visit the suggested resource.

Table 1 Resources for digital skills

Digital skill	Resources
Evaluation and trust	Deciding what to trust online Scams and hoaxes
Digital identity, and 'footprint'	My digital identity: making a good impression online Developing a good digital footprint
Finding information	Choosing good keywords Target your Google search
Communication	Communicating online

Discussion

You might want to come back to some of these resources when you have some more time, so make a note in your study journal of any useful links.

In this session so far you have considered your computer and digital skills and looked at some quick resources to help you build on your existing skills.

As you prepare for, and move through, study at the OU it's worth being aware of the valuable resource that is OpenLearn.

4 OpenLearn

The course you're doing right now is on OpenLearn. OpenLearn is where the OU offers short courses, articles and other content for free to anyone who wants to use them.

Although your time may be largely taken up with your formal studies, you can still take advantage of the free materials on OpenLearn. Like the course you are doing now, there are lots of resources that can support you in enhancing your skills and knowledge.

Recent research has shown that students who use OpenLearn, in addition to their formal modular study, are more likely to successfully pass their module and progress towards achieving their chosen qualification.

Some of the courses on OpenLearn involve 24 hours of study and on successful completion you receive a badge. Many of the badges provide evidence for skills that employers look out for, including digital skills, so they're a really good way to show what you're capable of, alongside your achievements in formal OU study.

There are also much shorter courses available as well as useful articles and videos.

There are lots of courses on OpenLearn around digital skills, so if the previous pages have made you think this is an area you would like to develop further, you might want to have a look at these.

You don't have to complete them now – you can click to enrol on them and then they'll be saved in your OpenLearn profile for you to come back to later on. Here are some possible suggestions:

- [Living with the internet: learning online](#)
- [Getting started with online learning](#)
- [Digital literacy: succeeding in a digital world](#)

You might also find the [Skills for study](#) and [Skills for work](#) pages useful.

You've almost completed the course but before you move to the quiz we've got some final words from other students.

5 What are the best things about studying?

Finally, watch and listen to our students talk about what they have found to be the best things about studying.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Best things about studying](#)



6 Summary of Session 6

You should now be able to:

- make sure you have all the equipment you need for study
- recognise if you need to improve your computer skills and know where to go for help
- understand what digital skills are and how you can improve yours
- use OpenLearn to support you in your studies.

7 The end-of-course quiz

You've now reached the end of this course. If you've worked through all the sessions you'll have covered all the basic information you need to know about OU study. Hopefully you now feel more confident about starting your studies.

You can now take the end-of-course quiz which will enable you to earn a digital badge. The quiz has 15 questions, which will relate to learning points from all the sessions of the course.

Why complete the quiz?

- Review, and if necessary revisit, what you've learned so you can be even more confident in starting your studies
- Get a digital badge which will display on your OpenLearn profile – you've achieved something before you've even started your formal study!

Go to the [end-of-course quiz](#) now.

When you have completed the quiz, come back here and you can think about your next steps to get ready for study.

8 Congratulations

Congratulations! You've now completed this course and should feel confident in the basics of being an OU student.

If you've worked through each page of this course and scored 50 per cent or more in the quiz you should have earned your badge, meaning that you'll have an official record of your achievement.

The fact you've worked through this course now puts you in a really good position for starting your studies. You should now have a good understanding of where to find everything you need, who you can contact for help and support, the skills and equipment you'll need and how OU study works. Getting to grips with all these aspects of study now frees you up to focus on the content of your module(s) when it starts.

Don't feel like you should know everything at this point. Next you'll learn more about your chosen qualification or subject area and when you start your module you'll be guided through the learning materials and assessments.

Good luck and we wish you every success with achieving your goals.

What next?

Now that you have completed the course we would really appreciate your feedback. If you haven't already done so and if you would like to share your experiences of taking this course, please fill in this [short survey](#).

Now it's time to focus on your chosen qualification or subject area. Go back to [New to OU study](#) and you'll find a link to induction materials for your subject. These will build on what you've learned here and get you started on what you're going to study. There is also a link to your key dates and deadlines for starting study.

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