

Australian academic expectations

5 minute self test

Which of the following Australian university expectations do you find difficult?

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|---------------------|--|
| 1. easy / difficult | Asking your teacher questions |
| 2. easy / difficult | Participating in organised discussions |
| 3. easy / difficult | Contributing to team assignments |
| 4. easy / difficult | Thinking critically about the work of others |
| 5. easy / difficult | Writing critically about the work of others |
| 6. easy / difficult | Supporting arguments with evidence |
| 7. easy / difficult | Expressing ideas in your own words |
| 8. easy / difficult | Following assessment procedures |

1. Active learning

In many universities around the world, the lecturer provides information and the student passively receives and accepts it. In Australia, the lecturer-student relationship is viewed differently. Lecturers may act as the initiators of information, but they expect students have ideas of their own, and encourage students to express these. Lecturers expect students to question and respond critically to information or ideas, in other words to learn actively. In some subjects, lecturers may even deliberately say something false to see if a student is prepared to correct them or argue against them!

2. Asking questions

You may be used to a learning situation in which asking questions is inappropriate. However:

- Australian academic culture values asking questions. In Australia, asking questions demonstrates a desire for knowledge and does not mean the student is ignorant or stupid. Asking questions makes a good impression.
- If you stay silent, your problem stays with you (and perhaps many other students).
- Asking the lecturer to repeat or explain what you do not understand helps the lecturer to understand what the problem is and to help you. There is nothing more exasperating for a lecturer who invites questions during a lecture to find later that students did not understand what was required. Of course, if you only ask other students, you may receive answers that are unclear or wrong.

3. Participation

Students in Australia are encouraged from a very young age to participate in the classroom. Many students from other cultures have not had this educational training so they can find this participation uncomfortable. As well as asking questions of the lecturer, active participation also

involves playing an active role in assignments and tasks. This means that you are expected to take the initiative, lead discussions, offer comments, and actively criticise the views of others. Provided you do so in a polite way, this is not considered rude or aggressive.

4. Contributing to team-produced assignments

You may be expected to contribute to many team assignments. You may be paired to work with Australian students. If you do not contribute verbally and in writing, it is likely you will be viewed as lazy or incompetent (this is not true, of course, but it will be viewed that way by others). Your fellow students may get upset and angry.

5. Following assessment procedures

In Australia, a deadline is a deadline. All work must be handed in by the due date. Unless you have a very forgiving tutor or lecturer, or you have a medical certificate from a doctor to explain your lateness, you will lose marks. If you need an extension for a legitimate medical reason, you must ask the lecturer at least two weeks before the due date. If you happen to be sick on the day, you must supply medical evidence for your inability to hand in your work on time. Failure to consistently hand in work by the time set will result in overall failure for your course of study. There is a practical reason for this strictness. It is unfair for some students to have longer than others to complete assessment work. However, there is also a cultural reason. Lateness will annoy and irritate people here very much. It is culturally unacceptable to be late.

6. Using your own words

This is also vital. At worst, students who do not do so are regarded as plagiarists (people who steal the work of others). At best, such students are thought of as lacking ideas and imagination and/or being incapable of understanding the material. You must become comfortable with paraphrasing and being able to identify plagiarism during your studies.

7. Supporting ideas with evidence

It is not enough just to make statements and give your opinions in your assignments. You must also provide evidence. How you do this will affect your grade. You will receive practice in finding and locating evidence for your chosen research topic during the course of your studies.

8. Thinking and writing critically

Thinking critically/criticise:	Critical:
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To find fault2. To judge or discuss the merits and faults of	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Inclined to find fault or to judge with severity2. Involving skilful judgement as to truth, merit, etc

You are probably familiar with the negative definitions of “criticise” and “critical” (Definition One in both cases, above). However, there is also a second, positive meaning to both words, and it is this meaning which is usually intended in the Australian academic context. It is very important to understand this because great value is placed on thinking about, questioning and analysing information rather than simply accepting information as correct.