

POSTGRADUATE STUDY: WHAT TO EXPECT

Postgraduate students can find their studies to be stimulating, exciting and rewarding, but study can also be frustrating and stressful. However you find it, your study will be a lot of hard work.

The study process is easier if you know what to expect and what your lecturers' expectations of you are. Here are some tips:

Self-management

The time management strategies that worked for you as an undergraduate student may need to be adjusted. You are likely to have more in your life now—family responsibilities, work, hobbies, and it may be some time since you last studied. This will be compounded by longer assignments that will take time to research and write. Learning Lab has many resources to help you plan your time and your writing tasks. Important tips to make the most of your time are:

- Be clear about when each assignment is due and what needs to be done for it
- Break each assignment down into manageable tasks
- Organise your time in half-hour blocks, identifying which specific task you'll complete in this time.

Learning

One of the aims of undergraduate study at least in the first year is to introduce you to your general area of study. You gradually become familiar with a range of topics pertinent to your program and a range of thinkers in these areas. Therefore, the focus is generally on **breadth**, rather than **depth**. However, in postgraduate study, the focus is generally on **depth**.

Here are some ways to engage in learning:

- Read with a purpose. Ask: What am I looking for in this text? Then ask: What am I going to **do** with this information now?
- Read any suggested texts before each lecture. This gives you a context for the lecture and information you can build from material in the lecture.
- **Analyse, critique** and **evaluate** concepts—don't just accept what you read or hear.
- You will be responsible for your own progress, so you will need a high level of independence. This is particularly important if you need to write a minor thesis. There will be long periods of time when you may not see your lecturer, so you will need to project manage yourself through this. To be an independent learner:
 - don't rely on getting all information from your lecturer
 - thoroughly read and understand your course guides
 - understand how and when you learn best
 - reflect on and evaluate your progress, identifying strategies for improvement
 - seek assistance from others when needed (e.g. your lecturer, the Study and Learning Centre, your library liaison officer, the Counselling service)
 - be **metacognitive**; that is, know what you know, and know what you don't yet know. Know
 - **what** you're learning
 - **why** you're learning
 - **how** you're learning.

STUDY TIPS

Writing

In some programs, there are few differences between undergraduate and postgraduate coursework study. If your undergraduate assessments were mostly through writing essays or reports, the only differences you might find are longer assignments and the need for a deeper and more critical engagement with your topics. However, if you are from a discipline such as engineering or applied sciences, you may have less experience in writing for assessment. You may also need to write a minor thesis, which will require careful time management.

Here are some expectations of postgraduate writing:

- Your written work is likely to be longer than you have previously experienced. This means you need to *plan* your work before you begin writing. See the study tip on essay writing for more information.
- At postgraduate level you need to show authority in your writing, using research to support your ideas. This means you have to develop your 'voice' by presenting information clearly and defending it. This is particularly important when you're incorporating the literature. Always begin with a strong statement, then let the literature back this up.
- Paragraphs are the building blocks of any writing. These carry the 'story' you're telling, so with longer texts it's even more important to get this right.

Paragraphs need:

- a clear topic sentence which governs the idea of the paragraph
- supporting sentences, each of which should meet a particular purpose, e.g. providing more detail, explanation, examples or evidence. All of this *must* relate to the topic sentence
- linking between sentences and linking between paragraphs
- adequate development; an academic paragraph should never contain only one sentence, and even two is probably not adequate.

Your paragraphs should fully develop one topic before moving on to the next.

Finally, don't forget that the Study and Learning Centre and the Library are ready to support you.