

Study Tips

For OU students, by OU students



An image of the OU library

Introduction

Thank you for downloading these Study Tips which have been provided by OU students. This has been divided into sections so you can hopefully find tips relevant to you, when you need them.

You will find some tips in here that seem to contradict each other. That's because there is no such thing as a typical OU student, so not all tips will work for everyone. Take some that you think might work, but if they aren't effective, experiment and find what works for you. It is a rare student who knows how best to study from day 1. Remember, what works for one module or subject might not work in another. Even what worked for you last month, might not work this one.

This is a collection of tips sent in by OU students which have worked for them. They are not officially recognised or tested study tips from the OU or the Students Association. The Students Association collected and collated the tips.

Good luck with your studies and Study Tip 1 - Enjoy it!

This is dedicated to all those who took the time to provide these tips and to those who helped me collect the tips, proof read them, and get them into a readable document. Thank you, it has been a great team effort.

Alison Kingan
Vice President Student Support

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It's ok

It's ok:

- to be happy to be back studying
- to not know the answer
- to make an informed guess
- to try and try again
- to mess up first, second or even third times
- to be a little worried or anxious (because it matters that much)
- to fall behind or work slightly ahead
- to feel overwhelmed one day and in control the next
- to be jovial and enthusiastic about everything you learn
- or to not remember anything half of the time
- to take your work seriously or to cry because that's how you feel
- to pace yourself or to work to your needs and abilities
- to make adjustments, defer or stick with it for the long haul
- (But most of all) to be OK with your unique self and, to journey through your studies in a way that unapologetically, suits YOU!!

Acronyms

You will find three acronyms throughout this document. I have listed them below in case you are new to the OU.

1. TMA – Tutor Marked Assignment – assignments throughout the module that are marked by your tutor.
2. EMA – End of Module Assignment – comes in various styles but it is a more substantial piece of work at the end of the module which is not usually marked by your tutor.
3. emTMA – End of Module Tutor Marked Assignment – a piece of work at the end of the module that is more substantial than a TMA. It is instead of an exam or EMA and will be marked by your tutor

Planning

'Plan all of your study time and TMAs, include where can you study - download the OU apps and study on the go too'

'Learn to love the study planner, it will guide you through the course, but don't get fixated. If you can only study in two bursts a month, that's fine, just let the planner keep you informed as to when the TMAs are coming, and as a running tally so you feel proud of how far you have come. By the same token, don't get so hung up in filling every tick box or you do yourself down.'

'Prepare your study area the way you enjoy it with all your study materials (your favourite highlighters, pens and stuff) and a cup of coffee or tea.'

Studying

'Read the assignment question first and foremost. So that when you're reading the module texts, you will find the direction you want go in, that forms your essay, becomes your authentic voice in what you want to convey.'

'I make a start when the websites open so can get at least 2 weeks ahead so have a buffer and helps doing 2 modules. Print off the assessment and referencing guides and TMAs and refer to TMAs whilst studying. I do references as I go along, saves a lot of time.'

'...download material onto your phone or tablet so when you're stuck waiting for a bus/train etc you can pick it up and do 5mins, lots of little 5 minutes add up and will allow you to get ahead on your timetable...'

'Take regular breaks with rewards...'

Making notes

'Try to find what works for you...online notes or written (even both) as this helps with EMA/exam time.'

'Reference your notes as you do them. One colour for general notes and another for anything you think might go in a TMA. Either electronic or on paper!'

'Before starting a new module block, look at the TMA it refers to and read the student guidance notes that accompany it, that way you'll know which parts of the materials are most relevant'

'Use different coloured highlighters to highlight different types of notes, e.g case studies, new words/terms, important info, explanations.'

'Put page numbers next to all your notes (or anything else that will help you find it again) so you know where you found the information'

Assignments

'Set a reminder for 1 week before an assignment's deadline and a second two days before to avoid late submission. I count the two days as the deadline so I have room for panic resubmission'

'Look at the TMA before starting each block, if possible answer as you go along, it's fresher in the mind and can save time.'

'Look at what your remaining assignments are. Visualise breaking this down into nice manageable chunks of 100 words a day (this tip alone is made up of 29 words!).'

'My number one tip is PLAN and stick to the PLAN for an essay type assignment. Spend time on the plan, make the plan an epic bit of work. Whenever I have a good plan I get high marks, when I have a shoddy plan I get low marks. For me a bad plan usually means I have not understood the subject matter. I use a basic essay plan with bullet points along with sort of a mind map that shows me how each part links in and joins my conclusion.'

'Highlight key parts of TMA questions and corresponding learning outcomes, then read your finished answer and use the same colour to highlight where you have addressed the question and learning outcome.'

'Lots of backups. Backup to your local system, a removable USB stick, and the OU provided OneDrive. If something does go wrong, if you back up to all three, at least one of them should still have a copy of your TMA.'

Exams, EMAs and emTMAs

'Get a head start, you'll want contingency time and extra exam prep time'

'Even if you can't attend them live, watch as many tutorials as possible. Some absolute gems for TMA answers and exam prep is to be had here'

'If something happens, on the day or just before your exam or EMA/emTMA submission that affects your performance, or if any special arrangements were not sufficient, please complete the Special Circumstances form. There's a very strict and short time limit for this. There's various places to get information, including your Assessment Handbook; the Help Centre; and your SST. Only telling your SST (Student Support Team) or your tutor, about these circumstances will not get passed on to the right people.'

'Panicking at the thought of exams? Talk to your tutor, other students, your SST and practise revision skills. Download Past Papers from the Association's shop and practise doing some of those.'

Referencing

'Reference as you go! If you find a quote that sticks with you, underline it in your text book but ALSO make a note of the quote, book and page in your notebook. The amount of quotes I wrote and then couldn't find when I wanted to use them ... facepalm!'

'Always have the referencing guides to hand - they will make it so much easier to reference a quote, plus if you reference as you go, you can't forget to reference something, and you will know if it pushes you over your word count.'

'If you are having trouble referencing, ask your tutor'

'The OU Library also has some short and sweet activities about avoiding plagiarism. If you aren't quite sure what plagiarism is, have a look on the Library website [here](#). More information about referencing and plagiarism can be found [here](#)'

Managing stress

'Don't worry if you look at the TMAs at the start of the module and don't have a clue what they mean or how to start them. Remember - you are studying so you can learn how to approach the answers.'

'Talk to Student Support, and your tutor. They're there to help you, and will find a way to do so, because there will be one. Don't give up if things feel like they're going wrong. There's a whole team at the OU who want you to succeed just as much as you do.'

'Never overdo it.. study for 1 hour then have a 20 minute break...'

'Do bits when you can, even with a spare half an hour make some notes, mulling over the question as the day goes on works wonders'

'When nothing is going right, walk away... just stop for ten minutes and come back with a refreshed mindset.'

'If you are struggling for time, consider looking at the TMAs and then ONLY read and study what you actually need in order to write those TMAs.'

'There is NOTHING WRONG with asking your tutor for an extension. Don't do it unless you need to, but if you need to, don't feel guilty about it. Life happens and I never once had an extension refused.'

'Contact the OU Students Association Peer Support service if you are feeling stressed, lonely or lost, or would like to talk to another student if something is having a negative impact on your studies. Peer Supporters have an understanding of what it's like to juggle studies when life intervenes. They can answer one off questions or offer a listening ear for a longer period of time. More information and how to access Peer Support can be found on this website page: <https://www.oustudents.com/peer-support>'

Tutors and tutorials

'Let tutors know if you are struggling'

'Go to tutorials - a few years ago I was stuck on a question, worth about 20 marks - was going to miss it out. Next day went to tutorial - the tutor explained it in a way that brought the book to life. I felt so much better about the question - came home and did it right away. Got my mark back - 15 marks - a whole load better than the no marks I was going to get.'

'Read and take in the tutor's feedback. It is there to help you improve for the next one.'

'If you are struggling with your TMA, consider talking to your tutor, who might have some useful advice, let you know if you are on the right track or maybe allow you an extension.'

Software

'OU Study is an app for Open University students, that gives you access to your module website on the go, so you have more choice about where, when and how you study.'

Disability

'If you have a disability, chronic illness or specific learning difficulty that impacts on your study talk to the OU as soon as possible. They can let you know what they can do to help.'

Engaging with other students

A good study buddy helps

'Be actively engaged in your TGF (Tutor Group Forum) - a great way to feel part of your group, and exchange useful information. There's lots of useful info and camaraderie to be gained.'

'Don't compare yourself to anyone else, everyone is different'

'There are students who like to get ahead for various reasons. Don't feel intimidated if you hear of other students starting to write their first TMA on the 2nd day of the module opening. Just follow the study planner and you'll be fine.'

Freshers

'Explore the forums as there's lots of great ideas and tips from students.'

'If you are unsure about anything or have a query you can contact your Student Support Team (SST) who are always super friendly and helpful.'

'Remember to keep note of all your new skills and celebrate your achievements!'

'Get involved with Freshers Fortnight and more widely the Student Association. Again, a great way to meet other students and find out about the many events etc. put on by the Association. It's also a lot of fun and could lead to further opportunities of volunteering and getting involved with the wider student community.'

Social Media

'You don't have to join in social media if you don't want to. If you do and find it isn't for you then switch it off permanently or for short periods.'

'Get involved with your fellow students on your module whether that's on the VLE forums, (virtual learning environment, basically behind the OU password wall) or on Facebook, where there are groups for your specific modules as well as larger groups for fans of cats, sci-fi, getting healthier, debate, religion, so many groups! Really, get involved, it helps.'

Warning, some WhatsApp groups have a worrisome habit of poor moderation, be very careful, and make yourself familiar with the rules around plagiarism etc.

Miscellaneous

OpenLearn is full of fun, free courses – but it's got plenty of courses that focus on study skills, too. Not that note taking isn't fun! You can pick up some new ideas and insights on ways to do things, from reading to researching, planning to paraphrasing, and everyone's favourite: referencing...'

'Do things your way. Some people like to get weeks ahead, or study between set hours, or always in a specific place or use a specific method. We all think and learn differently. Give new things a try, because you might be surprised, but don't keep trying to do things in a way that just doesn't work for you. Explore how YOU learn.'

'Most important of all...enjoy your study.'

Videos with tips

These four videos include tips from the Students Association's President from 2018 to 2020, Cath Brown. The four links below will open a different video on these subjects.

Tutorials - [here](#)

Starting your module - [here](#)

Module results - [here](#)

TMA 6 tips - [here](#)

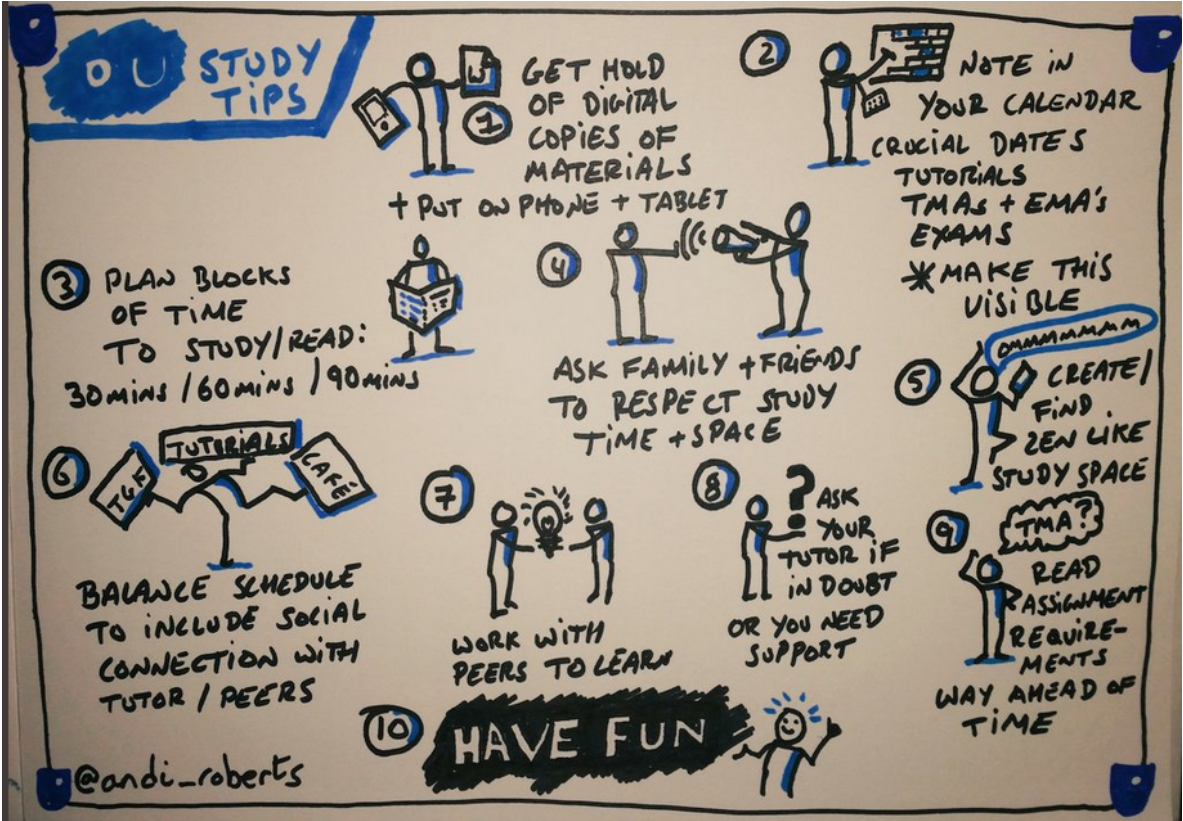
OU Resources and information

'Take advantage of the Library and Student Hub. Their tutorials about time management, referencing, essay planning etc. have been really helpful. Student Hub Live's website will open if you click [here](#)'

The OU Help Centre covers a range of topics. There's Study Skills, including revision techniques. The Careers Section, amongst other topics, looks at applying for jobs. There's some FAQs on Resubmitting EMAs in the Assessment and Exams area. Support for students with disabilities is covered, including some information about the DSA (Disabled Students Allowance). That is just scratching the surface, so if you've some spare time, explore the Help Centre and hopefully you will find something of interest. There is a link to the Help Centre website on your module website and StudentHome page.

10 study tips as an image

A lovely way to end this is the 10 study tips which you can copy, print out and keep an eye on throughout your module.



(Text alternative to image)

OU STUDY TIPS CREATED BY ANDI ROBERTS.

1. Get hold of digital copies of materials and put on phone or tablet
2. Note in your calendar crucial dates - tutorials, TMAs, EMAs, Exams. Make this visible.
3. Plan blocks of time to study/read 30 mins / 60 mins / 90 mins
4. Ask family and friends to respect study time and space
5. Create / find Zen like study space
6. Balance schedule to include social connection with tutor / peers
7. Work with peers to learn
8. Ask your tutor if in doubt or you need support
9. TMA? Read assignment requirements way ahead of time
10. Have fun.

A page for your own tips...