



Managing self

The mature student returning to study

If you are a new student, or you're returning to study after a long break, the important thing is to allow yourself time to discover what university is like for you. Expect to feel both confused and excited during the next little while as you settle in and begin to understand what is expected, and as you begin to define some of your study objectives. During this time, as well as trying to keep up with your study schedules, devote some energy into learning how to learn and into making contact with staff and other students involved in your subjects. Reward yourself for every achievement you make no matter how small.

Facing fears

Mature age students typically have high expectations of themselves and what they'll achieve but do not worry if you feel you'll not be able to keep up. You may need to relearn how best to learn. Age is not a barrier to learning and although it is a bit harder to learn at 50 years of age than 15, it is not that much harder. Some students have enrolled in their sixties and seventies and managed both to enjoy themselves and get a degree.

Many mature students feel that they will look foolish or lose face or status by failing. Accept that if returning to study after some years away, a feeling of anxiety or fear is normal. You are not alone in having it, and it is in most cases totally unwarranted. You will probably laugh at your fears before too long!

You should recognise that you have strengths that those with youth often lack. As a mature student you have many advantages over those straight from school. You may know where you are going in terms of money and career, or what you are giving up (such as free time, sleep, or a social life) and will be more highly motivated to succeed. A strong motivation can more than make up for a very minor reduction in the speed at which you can learn new things.

Computers and educational technology may be something that you're not really familiar with. Keep reminding yourself that you're not too old to learn; that's why you've enrolled in uni in the first place! Embrace new technology and update your skills. Here are some practical things you can do:

- Become more familiar with CSU's online environment by browsing from you're my.csu desktop
- Use the guides provided on the Learning Skills website: [Online Learning @CSU](#)
- Check the step-by-step guide to the online environment in the [Guide to Learning](#).
- Enrol in CSU Learning Skills [STUDY LINK](#) subject: *Skills for Learning Online* – a 30-hour self-paced subject that will help you become more familiar with and use the online environment at the university.
- Complete the self-paced [Knowledgebank Web-based IT training](#)
- Take a course at a TAFE or Community College for some basic computer-use skills.

Be responsible for your own learning

Your lecturers do not assume responsibility for telling you what to learn or how to learn it. You have to manage these things for yourself. As an adult learner it's up to you to decide how much effort to put in.

- Decide priorities.
- Set targets.
- Work out strategies for achieving them (learning skills advisers can help you).
- Learn how to best manage your time and study.
- Take responsibility for deciding what views to hold.

Lecturers expect you to form your own judgements about the strengths and weaknesses of various ideas. You have to be able to:

- weigh up ideas not just learn them
- argue for one idea against another, not just repeat both.

If you're returning to study after a long time, it may take a while to adjust. However, your target is eventually to become an independent student: to be able to find your way round a subject yourself. When you take control of your own study, you're in a position to make knowledge and understanding really do some work for you.

Be an active learner. The emphasis changes from being a passive receiver of 'knowledge' to being an active seeker for 'understanding'.

It seems easier to learn by doing, rather than merely listening or reading. Try some of these active strategies as well as reading the textbooks and set reading material:

- draw diagrams
- create tables
- create a [concept map](#)
- read your notes and condense them
- write notes or concept map main points as you read
- aim to write a sentence summarising each paragraph in a text
- create review cards with questions on one side and answers on the other (review often)
- search the library shelves or catalogue for information
- explain a topic or concept aloud to an interested adult (whether they're present in the room with you or not!). The act of explaining will help sort out your ideas.

Develop study skills

There are many different aspects to learning how to study, all of which tend to be gathered under the general heading of 'study skills'. There are study **habits** such as:

- creating a well set out study space (at home, or perhaps the local or uni library)
- scheduling study breaks
- make a habit of adding an [in-text and end-of-text reference](#) in your assignment draft every time you add a comment which quotes or is based on information from a text.
- actively taking notes or making concept maps whenever you read an academic text.

There are study **techniques** such as:

- the way you set out your notes on a page,
- how to file your notes and reference your sources.

There are study **strategies** such as the way you:

- [allocate your study time](#)
- [approach essay preparation](#)
- handle interruptions
- [handle any tendency to procrastinate](#)

Balance study and personal relationships

Your family:

- You and the family will probably need to make some changes.
- Talk about your decision to study and your need for space and interruption free time. Do they understand why you want to do this study?
- Consider asking for help from extended family, friends or commercial support agencies. Perhaps they will take the children to the movies or sport on a weekend while you study. If the budget will allow, arranging regular help with cleaning could be a worthwhile investment in achieving your goal(s)
- Be aware that students with children and partners are prone to feel guilty about delegating responsibilities or not spending as much time with them as they did before commencing studies. Talking and planning helps to avoid some problems and cope with others.
- Keep reminding yourself that you're not the first person, nor will you be the last, to face these issues. Others have managed, and so can you, but it might need family discussion and joint effort.

Your job:

- Recognise that work skills may help you achieve success at university. Even unrelated work may require you to use your mind imaginatively to solve problems and to grapple with new ideas, so your brain won't feel rusty when you tackle formal study.
- Recognise the demands of your job and plan your time carefully to include study.
- Check out study entitlements such as study leave or time off to attend any required DE on-campus residential schools.
- Be aware of assignment deadlines and exam dates so you can apply well in advance for study leave or flex days at strategic times
- Be brave. Contact your lecturer about negotiating a new due date for an assignment extension when peak work (or life) demands are threatening to squeeze out study time.
- Calculate the time you spend at work and travelling when deciding whether to study on campus or by distance education. Be flexible. If demands are too taxing, you may need to reduce your study load for a semester or longer.

You:

- You may be spending long hours studying to achieve your goals and it can be several months before you receive feedback on your first assignments and progress.
- Give yourself credit for each success, large and small. Staying on track with your study schedule for a week; presenting an oral tute paper; or using a mind map to demystify a particularly hard reading can all be cause for celebration.
- Reward yourself. Tell significant others.
- Schedule time with family and friends.
- Schedule time for things you like so you achieve a balance between study and the rest of your life. Go for a run or walk, visit the gym, see a movie, watch a DVD, write a letter, make a phone call...

Network

Find a study buddy and ask each other questions to review topics and to analyse assignments. Recounting what you have just learned reinforces the information. Perhaps you have a supportive partner, family member or neighbour who will willingly listen.

Form a study group with other mature age students and meet face to face, by phone or email. Bounce your latest ideas and information off them and hear theirs in return:

- use Subject Forums
- create an *Interact* project site for collaborative study
- Be proactive on the following Student Services forums:
 - [Student Life Forum](#)
 - [Learning Skills Forum](#)
 - [Mature Age Students Forum](#)

Ask for help sooner rather than later

Keep in touch with your subject co-ordinators, lecturers and tutors. Ask questions about any points you don't understand. Be sure to let them know about your needs if there is a crisis or a series of mini-crises in your life. You can request an extension to assignment work and/or apply for [Special Consideration](#).

Check out the [helpful resources for mature-aged students](#) located on the [Student Services website](#).

Contact a Learning Skills Adviser or Student Counsellor through [Student Central](#).

References

Bucknall, K. B. (1995). *How to succeed as a student*.

Marshall, L. & Rowland, F. (1993). *A guide to learning independently*. (2nd ed.). Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

Northedge, A. (1990). *The good study guide*. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University

Wade, S. (1996). *Studying for a degree: How to succeed as a mature student in higher education*. Plymouth, England.

Additional web resources

The following web resources provide further information and have been used as a basis for the construction of this guide. You can google for other sites by typing, for example, 'mature student' as the search term, *but try to ensure the sites you use are reliable sites*.

Mature Age Students

<http://www.csu.edu.au/division/studserv/support/chaplain/mature.htm>

Return to Study: Advice for mature age students

<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/llsu/students/return.html>

Tertiary studies: Mature age students

http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Tertiary_studies_mature_age_students?OpenDocument