

The Art of Re-Learning: A Guide to Academic Readiness

THE ART OF RE-LEARNING: A GUIDE TO ACADEMIC READINESS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

This textbook was written on the lands of the Wadawurrung people, of the Kulin Nation. I would like to acknowledge and show my respects to the Traditional Custodians of these lands, where I am privileged to live and work. I recognise that I carry on the traditions of learning and teaching that have been practiced on this land for generations, and I pay my respects to all Elders, past, present and emerging.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Liam Frost-Camilleri has worked in various educational settings including public and private secondary schools, vocational education teaching the Vocational Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and as a Literacy and Numeracy Coordinator for a dual-sector Registered Training Organisation. Currently, Liam holds a position as an Academic at Federation University, teaching in the Federation Access Studies (FAST) and the Master of Teaching courses. His research interests include literacy and numeracy, equity in education, teaching pedagogies, engagement, second-chance education, educational policy, neurodiversity in education and, of course, enabling education. Liam was the recipient of the *NAEEA National Teaching Excellence Award* in 2024.

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I am indebted to you all and deeply appreciate all you have done to help me become the educator I am today.

Liam (Leigh) Frost-Camilleri

A NOTE ON THIS TEXTBOOK

This textbook is written specifically for you, the students who *may* have not followed the traditional path to university. In Australia, there are programs designed to help students like you develop the skills necessary to successfully navigate a bachelor's degree. These programs are known as “enabling” courses. They focus on essential skills such as writing, reading, research, mathematics, and study skills. This textbook focuses on the latter, addressing a current gap in resources by exploring the emotional aspects of re-learning and acknowledging that many of you may have had negative and often damaging past educational experiences.

The Art of Re-learning invites you to compassionately reflect on and reframe your experiences, empowering you to approach your higher education learning journey with confidence, self-awareness, and belief in your potential.

While this textbook is designed for Australian enabling students, much of what you will learn here is relevant to any first-year university or college student navigating the complexities of higher education. It offers practical strategies and insights into building a strong foundation for learning, growth, and development.

As you read this textbook, you will notice the inclusion of citations. Citations acknowledge the work of other researchers, and they are presented by including an author's name and year of publication, for example, (Smith, 2020) would reference work published by Smith in 2020. If you are interested in an idea cited in this textbook, you can find the full reference list at the end of each chapter to explore further.

The author acknowledges that many of you may have faced “deficit discourses” in your educational journey. Deficit discourse refers to the way mainstream education often labels students from marginalised groups by focusing on perceived weaknesses and barriers rather than their strengths and unique experiences. Unfortunately, students enrolling in enabling courses often face additional challenges, such as belonging to a minority group, managing a disability, or being labelled as “at risk” of failing. These labels can make traditional learning environments difficult to navigate. While the author has made every effort to celebrate your strength and resilience in this textbook, deficit discourses still appear in certain educational research, political documents, and policy documents. If anything in this textbook triggers negative feelings about your situation, the author sincerely apologises, as this is not the intention. This textbook is intended to equip you with the tools to successfully navigate your first year of university study while promoting a positive, empowering, and compassionate view of your experiences. As you explore *The Art of Re-Learning*, you will discover that re-learning is not only about acquiring new knowledge, it is about letting go of assumptions and habits that no longer serve you, allowing you to reconnect with the person you were always meant to be.

Accessing Handouts

All handouts are linked to the title of the learning activity. Alternatively, all handouts can be downloaded in pdf format in the Appendices section of this textbook.

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ADVICE FOR TEACHERS

0.1 Why this book?

The role of enabling education is to ‘bridge the gap’ for students who would otherwise not have access to higher education. Enabling is a complex and rewarding discipline centred on equity, inclusion, and empowerment. We address barriers to educational access, foster confidence, resilience, and academic preparedness for students who have faced significant challenges. Despite difficulties such as funding instability and neoliberal pressures, enabling education remains steadfast in advocating for underrepresented students. If you are new to teaching in this space, welcome! For experienced enabling educators, I hope this textbook supports your work to rebuild learner identities.

Many current textbooks centre on university transition in general, often ignoring the multifaceted experiences of enabling students. This is the gap that this textbook addresses. Study skills, psychological insights, and research have been curated specifically for enabling students, making this textbook an important resource. This textbook is centred on student experiences, and aims to support lecturers in their work to empower by reshaping learner identities, challenging negative learner perceptions, and recognising enabling students as valuable assets in our universities. By placing the student at the centre of our work, we continue to create environments that celebrate diverse perspectives and foster empowerment.

“Advice for teachers” sections of textbooks usually centre on delivering the content and maximising student learning. While this section explores basic pedagogy to be used alongside this textbook, it also briefly examines the nature of enabling education and its teachers and students.

As the initial audience is Australian enabling students and teachers, the content is Australian-centric in nature. Readers from other countries may find it useful to skim over section 0.2 and spend more time perusing from 0.3 onwards.

0.2 Enabling education

The last few decades have seen a significant widening of participation and diversity of students at university (Crank, 2023). To cater for the diversity of student enrolments and promote equitable access to tertiary education, the Australian Government has endorsed enabling courses; fee-free programs designed to prepare students for bachelor-level study (Davis & Bull, 2023). These initiatives are known by many names in Australia, including bridging, foundation, preparatory, pathway, and more recently, Fee-Free Uni Ready programs (Crank, 2023; Davis & Bull, 2023). Enabling courses were originally defined in the Higher Education Support Act (HESA), as “a course of instruction provided to a person for the purpose of enabling the person to undertake a course leading to a higher education award” (HESA, 2003, p. 541).

Enabling courses are non-award, non-accredited programs that allow students to explore university study without incurring a Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debt.

Enabling's growth has been substantial, with enrolments increasing by over 400% between 2001 to 2020 (NAEEA, n.d.). The Australian Government has recently pledged \$350.3 million to Fee-Free Uni Ready programs (Department of Education, 2024), highlighting the broad support for enabling education's ability to foster equitable access to education. Enabling courses play an important role in addressing systemic barriers to higher education, particularly for underrepresented students. Their success in academic preparation is largely attributed to the ongoing development and refinement of enabling pedagogies.

0.3 Enabling pedagogies

Enabling pedagogy is shaped by a range of student-centred approaches that provide tailored academic support while honouring the educational experience of the students. Rooted in social justice, empowerment, and an acknowledgement of student diversity, the strength of enabling courses is in their 'soft benefits', such as increased student confidence, self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, increased motivation, and academic success (Davis & Bull, 2023; Lisciandro et al., 2023; Olds et al., 2022). The curriculum focuses on language and literacies, critical thinking, numeracy, study skills, university culture, and academic literacy (Davis et al., 2023; Lisciandro et al., 2023).

Research in enabling education is still emerging but often suggests deepening the above practices to better address harmful self-beliefs concerning education and ability (Davis & Bull, 2023). Techniques like storytelling, self-sharing, and promoting resilience and self-awareness are also highly endorsed (Larsen & James, 2022; James & Walters, 2020). These approaches are closely aligned with the foundational principles of enabling education, particularly their emphasis on equity, social justice, and psychological research. Together they form the basis of what is known as pedagogies of care.

Pedagogies of care aim to challenge neoliberal approaches in universities, notably their so-called 'careless' practices of emphasising enrolment numbers over student support and treating lecturers as recruitment tools (Motta & Bennett, 2018). Pedagogies of care are rooted in dialogic relationships, providing holistic support tailored to the needs of the students (Crank, 2023). According to Motta and Bennett (2018), pedagogies of care have three components:

- **Recognition:** Acknowledging students' diverse experiences and potential:
- **Relationality:** Building strong relationships and rejecting the traditional one-way teaching model:
- **Affective and embodied praxis:** Valuing the emotional and embodied aspects of education, prioritising vulnerability and openness over competition and shame.

These pedagogies are multifaceted, individualised, and worth exploring in greater detail. Understanding the students we teach, however, is also extremely important.

0.4 Enabling students

Enabling students face many challenges, including having a diversity of needs, lacking role models, struggling with academic confidence, family and employment responsibilities, and increased mental health issues (James & Walters, 2020; Lisciandro et al., 2023). 50% of students enrolled in enabling programs are from an equity group [1], compared to 30% in undergraduate programs (Lisciandro et al., 2023).

Deficit discourses refer to the framing of under-represented students as lacking essential academic and social skills (Larsen & Frost-Camilleri, 2023). It is difficult to write about enabling students without engaging with deficit discourses. Terms like ‘at risk’, ‘vulnerable’, or ‘marginalised’ are part of our government and university policies and procedures, our research, and our educational interventions. Educational institutions use deficit discourses to rationalise resource needs, attributing marginalised students’ lack of academic progress to personal shortcomings rather than their responsibilities to provide accessible education (Larsen & Frost-Camilleri, 2023). Nonetheless, there are several strategies we can employ to address some of these issues.

Deficit discourses can be challenged by reframing student identities and altering our wording (Larsen & Frost-Camilleri, 2023). Flipping the responsibility for accessible education to the institution, as detailed above, is a good example of this. A strength-based learning approach that recognises the students’ diverse experiences as assets can also help. Explicitly teaching soft skills such as developing self-efficacy, confidence, and employing positive psychology principles are also said to foster personal growth and well-being (James & Walters, 2020). Moreover, developing a sense of belonging by encouraging students to interact with the environment, and the social and cognitive aspects of university life increases student motivation and aids successful transition (Pedler et al., 2022).

Reframing student experiences as assets to our institutions redefines deficit discourses and increases student motivation, self-efficacy, and confidence. In many ways, reflecting on and understanding our students requires an examination and reflection of ourselves as educators.

0.5 Enabling educators and universities

Enabling educators play multifaceted roles beyond traditional university teaching. They provide academic and emotional support, work to empower students, and are advocates for equity (Crank, 2023). They also work to disrupt deficit discourses and promote positive student identities, providing healthier mindsets and coping strategies (Davis et al., 2023; James & Walters, 2020). Hence, the enabling teacher is a multifaceted role and enabling is arguably a discipline in its own right.

However, enabling’s non-accredited status presents structural challenges and enabling programs often lack a stable ‘home’ within universities, making them vulnerable to changes in government funding and institutional restructures. Often, enabling programs face the challenge of demonstrating their importance to their institution (Davis et al., 2023), and remain at the fringe of university culture. Despite this, a recent cross-institutional benchmarking study reveals that shared curricula, learning outcomes, and success rates are similar among enabling programs across institutions (Davis et al., 2023). Enabling students often

perform as well or better than their undergraduate counterparts (Davis et al., 2023; Lisciandro, 2022). Despite variations in duration, delivery methods, and target audiences, enabling programs share a common focus on supporting successful educational pathways (Crank, 2023). In fact, the success of enabling courses has prompted some researchers to suggest other university programs adopt similar approaches to address student retention issues (Hattam et al., 2024). The unifying factor of enabling courses is the belief in equity, social justice, and access to education. These elements become even stronger when connecting with enabling communities.

0.6 Enabling communities

The National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA) is the leading organisation supporting enabling education in Australia. NAEEA advocates to improve educational access, provides professional development opportunities (including hosting a bi-annual conference), promotes and conducts research, disseminates resources, establishes and maintains professional standards, and facilitates networking opportunities through special interest groups, known as SIGs. Other organisation and professional bodies might not be enabling education focused but may still provide valuable support depending on your cohort's needs. Reach out to organisations in your interest areas and explore opportunities to become actively involved. Engaging with NAEEA and similar organisations can deepen your understanding of pedagogy and connect you with like-minded professionals: <https://enablingeducators.org/>.

Whether you are new to this field or have years of experience, your work is invaluable in fostering equity and supporting students to re-learn their potential as learners. I hope this textbook offers you practical tools, fresh insights, and a sense of connection to the vital role we play as enabling educators. Thank you for being a part of this important work, and best wishes as you continue to empower students on their enabling journey.

Accessing Handouts

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Providing Feedback

Each chapter has a [link](#) to provide anonymous feedback on the textbook. You can also contact the author directly via email: l.frost-camilleri@federation.edu.au.

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[1] Equity groups refer to students who face challenges associated with their background or circumstances, including those from low socio-economic backgrounds, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, remote or regional students, neurodivergent students, or students with disabilities. Universities often collect data on these groups to monitor access and inclusion, however, the definition and classification of equity groups can vary between institutions.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO UNIVERSITY

Liam Frost-Camilleri

Learning Objectives

- Understand the challenges and benefits of university attendance
- Identify your personal motivations for a university education
- Analyse strategies in managing yourself and your learning
- Navigate university expectations and responsibilities

1.1. Beginnings

Deciding to attend university is a significant step, especially if you are what we call, first-in-family, live in a remote area, have a disability, or feel marginalised due to financial challenges or other reasons. There are assessments to research and write, feedback to navigate, new friendships to forge, and a need to balance your life with your study, work, and home commitments. Not to mention the expectations of being at university. You need to show independence by taking charge of your university studies; muster your self-motivation; find your resilience; and be open to working with others, while figuring out how you learn best and manage your time. Feeling anxious about this transition is entirely normal (and even sometimes desirable) as you navigate this new experience. While some aspects may seem daunting, the benefits of a university education can be profoundly eye-opening, life-changing, and well worth the effort. It may also help you remember that regardless of your situation, many people have benefited from a university education despite their challenges.

While it is true that you will enjoy a stronger economic advantage and better health outcomes when you complete a degree, it is important to highlight how critical thinking and reflection, when taught well, can change your life. You are not just learning about the content you are studying; you are learning about yourself. You are not just learning how to do a job; you are learning how to be critical and perhaps change the face of the profession you are entering. It is therefore worth considering not only the motivations that you have for going to university, but what else a university education might offer you.

1.2 Why University?

The reasons why students want to attend university can vary. While some students attend for career prospects, personal and academic growth (Universities Australia, 2022), social and family expectations (Arkoudis et al., 2019) and the potential to receive financial support such as scholarships (Cherastidtham et al., 2018), one of the primary reasons people choose higher education is economic (Trounson, 2018). Students want a ‘good job’ that ‘pays well’ and, while it is true that having a university education means that you may enjoy more economic stability later in life, there are other considerations to keep in mind. Additionally, many students hold lifelong dreams of attending university to enter an occupation that they have an affinity with but often believe that they are incapable until they begin attending.

Universities usually map the benefits to completing a degree to a series of ‘graduate attributes’ that are linked to researched findings. These attributes typically fall under a few basic ideas such as career advantages, personal development, societal impact, cultural competence, integrity, and creating supportive and inclusive environments. The aspect we would like to focus on here tends to fall under personal development, specifically two important skills known as ‘**critical thinking**’ and ‘**reflection**’.

While these two skills are related, there are some subtle differences between critical thinking and reflection. Critical thinking involves analysing, examining and evaluating situations and texts, as well as scrutinising your beliefs. It is a challenging process that requires you to think deeply about the world you live in and who you would like to be within it. The process of thinking critically helps you to make judgements, clarify situations, and articulate your perspectives. This skill can keep burning questions alive in your mind, helping you feel motivated, and assist you in making difficult decisions in life. At university, critical thinking is used to help analyse information, problem solve, write, and research as well as interact with lecturers and classmates. Reflection, on the other hand, involves thinking deeply about past events or your identity and reasons behind it. It can be a very personal exercise and sometimes reveals more than you expected. People who reflect often face hard truths and spend a lot of time journaling about their thoughts and attitudes. In courses such as teaching or nursing, reflection is used to improve job performance, but it is also employed in other courses to encourage deep thinking about assessments and feedback received. Reflection is a metacognitive tool, a way to think about your own thinking.

1.3 Anxiety

You are probably feeling a mix of emotions at the moment. The excitement of starting something new and progressing down a path you have always wanted mixed with the fear and uncertainty of what this adventure might bring. These are important emotions that need to be acknowledged, and it is worth focusing on anxiety specifically. It is well documented that beginning university can cause a high level of anxiety (January et al., 2018), which is not at all surprising. Fear of the unknown or making a fool of yourself are valid feelings that deserve to be acknowledged, but it is important to remember that small levels of anxiety can also be beneficial.

Since COVID-19, our collective understanding of anxiety has shifted to viewing it as concerning. The

research shows a negative correlation between anxiety and academic performance, indicating a need for interventions and support (Osborn et al., 2022). We spend a lot of time trying to avoid anxiety, which can make it worse. Having anxiety about attending university is not only normal, but somewhat desirable as it provides an opportunity to understand yourself and your needs. The important point to remember is to develop strategies to address your anxiety. Get to know the supports at your university early; most provide access to free counselling services, coaches, learning specialists, disability liaisons, and study aids as a part of your enrolment. You will also find some information on dealing with anxiety in a later chapter of this book. Surrounding yourself with supports to find out what does and does not work will not eliminate anxiety but can help you to develop strategies to successfully manage it. Lastly, as a quick note, the anxiety discussed in this book does not include anxiety disorders. If you feel you may have an anxiety disorder, the first step in addressing it would be to make an appointment with a General Practitioner to review your options.

1.4 Imposter syndrome

Imposter syndrome refers to the feeling that your success is undeserved or that you are somehow unworthy of being where you are. Many students can feel like imposters when they first start university, and some even after they have completed a PhD, the highest degree you can obtain in higher education. Research indicates that imposter syndrome can lead to ‘compassion fatigue’, a growing inability to remain compassionate to your own situation (Schmulian et al., 2020). This compassion fatigue is why, if you feel you are suffering from imposter syndrome, it is important to share your feelings. You will likely find that many of your peers (and even your lecturers) feel the same way and can share their experiences, helping you find strategies to cope. It might also be helpful to focus on the facts of the situation: you are enrolled in the course, making you a university student and you deserve to be there. Being compassionate toward yourself by accepting your failures, celebrating your successes and letting go of perfectionism are all great ways to move past the idea that you are not ‘good enough’ to attend university. But this process will take time and effort. Additionally, you may feel that you are a perfectionist. Perfectionism has become a common trait for those who are studying, but it is important to understand that perfectionism is external; it aims to control the way people view you and hide shame or a feeling that you are not ‘enough’. The strongest antidote to perfectionism is vulnerability through discussing how you feel about the situation. Perfectionism can also make hearing criticism very difficult. Criticism and feedback are discussed at length in Chapter 6 of this textbook. There you will learn that being able to navigate feedback that might be difficult to read or hear is an important skill to learn when studying. Moving away from perfectionism and towards healthy striving will change your perspective from what others think to your own personal growth, while making you more receptive to feedback.

[Learning Activity 1.1 Understanding why you are attending university \[PDF\]](#)

It is important that you examine your reasons for attending university and acknowledge your anxieties so you can start to move past them. Try responding to these questions to help you through the process:

- Take a few minutes to reflect and think about why you decided to attend university. List three potential reasons.
- Do these reasons relate to what was written in the Chapter? How are they the same and how do they differ?
- What are your two main anxieties about attending university?
- What are some ways that you can start to address these anxieties?

1.5 Transition

Over the years, universities have experienced what we call ‘increased participation’. Increased participation means that more people are enrolling into university than ever before, and those people are from different walks of life. While increased participation is positive because it means more people are gaining access to valuable education, it also presents universities with the challenge of catering for different students with diverse needs. Research indicates that universities are not always great at assessing and meeting student needs, even though they are trying to. The sticking point here tends to be differences between the expectations of students and the expectations of the university.

1.6 University Expectations

The expectations of university mainly revolve around attendance, participation, organisation, and conduct in class, which is why being an independent learner is so important. To meet many of these expectations there is a need for you to take control of your learning. There is more about independent learning in Chapter 2.

While university can resemble secondary school in terms of lecturers’ varied teaching styles, it differs greatly in that most lecturers will rely on university systems to actively monitor attendance, completion of work, or academic progress. Lecturers will collect data on these things, but will generally not spend time following these aspects up. If you receive a phone call or email from the university about your attendance or academic progress, it generally will not come from the lecturers (depending on the university). This hands-off approach may seem strict, but it does not imply a lack of support or care. While the lecturers may not regularly check on your progress, they are generally willing to assist if you reach out to them. Additionally, universities typically offer supports such as organised study groups, peer mentoring by graduates of your program, and access to counselling, financial, and medical services. However, it is your responsibility, as

a student, to seek out these resources, making it crucial to be well-informed about what your university provides.

It is important to understand the role of your lecturers. Secondary school teachers focus on guiding students through structured curricula, and introducing foundational knowledge. In contrast, lecturers see themselves as subject specialists or researchers; merely a guide to the advanced content they present. Importantly, lecturers tend not to see themselves as teachers. This means that, unlike teachers, most lecturers and programs will not accept drafts of assessments; you typically have only one chance to submit your assessment. While some lecturers may provide feedback if your work does not meet their expectations, this is not always the case. Therefore, it is crucial to be clear on what is expected of you for every class and task. It is worth noting that in certain situations you will be offered additional opportunities to demonstrate your understanding through supplementary tasks or resubmissions. These tasks are given by university lecturers if they believe you need another chance to meet the required level of their course or unit.

Universities will always provide written details about their assessments, including deadlines, marking criteria, procedures for extensions, and the expected length and format of your submissions. This information is typically accessible through an online learning system or course booklet. It is crucial to record the assessment dates and consider how much time you will need for each task. Assessment deadlines are usually strict, and late submissions often incur penalties such as a loss of marks, impacting your overall grade. While some lecturers may remind you of upcoming deadlines, others may not, so staying organised and aware of deadlines are essential when becoming an independent learner.

1.7 Success

Many students are very focused on achieving success when they first attend university. The main challenge with success at university lies in the grading system. Most universities employ a grading system such as ‘High Distinction, Distinction, Credit, Pass, Fail’¹ where a score of 50% usually constitutes a passing grade. It is common for students to aim for High Distinctions in their first assessments. Achieving a High Distinction typically reflects an exceptional level of mastery, so it is important to manage your disappointment if you do not achieve it on your first few assessments. Failing an assessment similarly does not imply a lack of effort or not belonging to your course or unit. Often, a failed assessment can be compensated for by other assessments in the course or unit. For instance, if you receive a fail grade on one assessment (10/30 or 33%), but a pass on the next two (20/35 or 57% and 23/35 or 65%), your overall grade may still be a pass (10+20+23=53/100). Many students successfully navigate courses or units in this manner which may require you to adjust your definition of ‘success’.

Having clear expectations and goals to work towards is crucial for maintaining motivation and achieving success in your studies. For example, when starting a teaching degree, your initial goal might be to become

1. This grading is roughly equivalent to the ‘A, B, C and D’ system that you might have seen in secondary school.

a good teacher. However, as you refine your craft, your goal may evolve to: I would like to inspire others. Remaining open to adjusting your goals and redefining success is an essential aspect of personal growth during your university journey.

While your lecturers possess extensive knowledge of their content and research, your parents, siblings, relatives, or friends who have attended university may offer you advice. However, those who truly understand what you are going through are your peers in your class. While speaking to those around you can be helpful, it is important to remember that your fellow students are invaluable when navigating university life. Building friendships at university helps maintain engagement, a sense of belonging, and resilience during your studies. However, not all students navigate social dynamics smoothly. Having university friends does not necessitate becoming best friends or spending every moment together. Approach friendships at university with an open mind, understanding that they may only last for the semester or term and be limited to class interactions. This is often referred to as the circle of friendship, where university friends may fall into the ‘acquaintances’ circle (see figure 1).

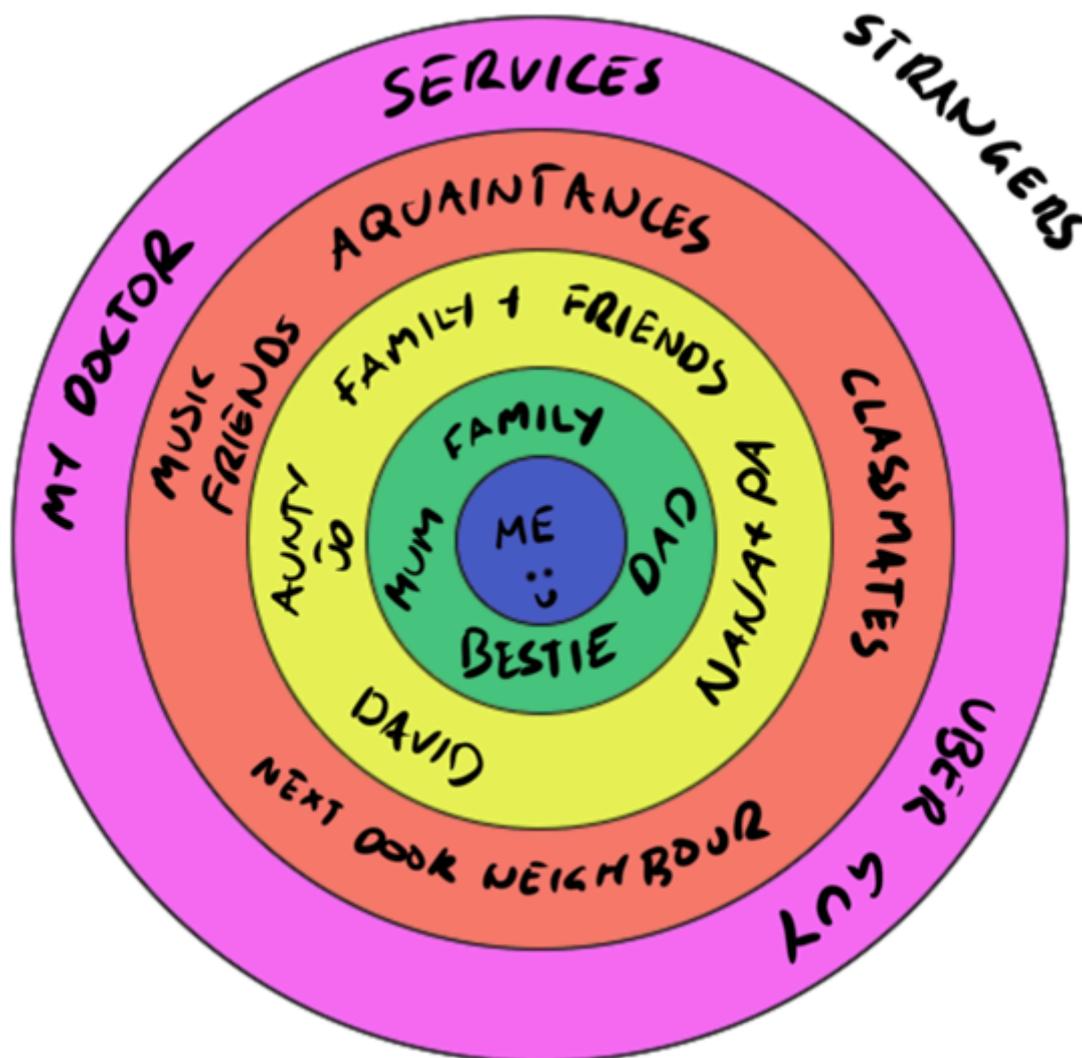


Figure 1. Circle of Friendship [Infographic], by Liam Frost-Camilleri, 2024. [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

While success at university can be influenced by various factors, one of the most significant influences is your own self-management. This book will cover resilience and maintaining focus, but fundamentally, you must learn to manage yourself. Becoming engaged in the course or unit materials, connecting with your classmates, attending class, asking questions, and starting your research early are all helpful ways that you can ensure your success at university. Remember why you started this learning journey and keep your goals in mind; they will guide you through this wonderful challenge.

1.8 Balance

While many university courses consist of classes that only meet for 2-3 hours a week, you will quickly discover that the amount of study involved is more substantial than anticipated. Due to this intense

workload, it is crucial to discuss how you will strike a balance between home, work, and study life. Throughout this book, there are various strategies to enhance your engagement with university study, but it is important to acknowledge that balance can sometimes be elusive. We often talk about balance when we have not prioritised something important, such as spending time with your family or completing assessments on time. Striving for balance may not account for the intensive time needed for certain aspects of life. Assessments may require sacrificing other priorities, just as attending to a sick family member demands focused time and attention. Instead of searching for a balanced approach, managing situations effectively may involve focussing intensely on what is most critical at the time. Here are some strategies to help identify these priorities and navigate these challenges:

Engaging a flexible routine. It may seem counter-intuitive to the above points about balance being elusive, but engaging in a flexible routine can be highly beneficial. Establishing a weekly or daily flexible routine allows you to allocate time to your priorities while remaining adaptable to important tasks as they arise. For example, you might plan to study from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. every day, followed by an hour of exercise just before dinner. If something urgent comes up, such as a group meeting or unexpected errands, you can shift your study time to earlier in the day while still maintaining your overall structure. Following a routine also provides a sense of familiarity and can contribute to improved mental health. However, when developing a flexible routine, it is crucial not to compromise on sleep. Adequate sleep is essential for effective learning, so ensure you prioritise sleep and, during busy times, aim to get more sleep than you normally would to aid recovery.

Setting boundaries. Many people find setting boundaries quite difficult, but it is crucial to maintain focus on your goals and achievements. Learning to say ‘no’ in favour of your own needs is essential for taking control of your educational journey, especially as assessment and exam times approach. It can be difficult to set boundaries when you are not used to it, consider using phrases like the following:

- “I’d love to help, but I need to focus on my university work right now.”
- “I’m sorry, I cannot commit at the moment as I have some deadlines to meet.”
- “I really appreciate the offer, but I need to prioritise university at the moment.”

It can also be helpful to set some clear expectations for those around you by letting your friends and family know the times you will be unavailable due to study.

Looking after yourself. Aside from getting enough sleep, it is vital to incorporate self-care practices into your study routine. Eating light nutritious meals, engaging in enjoyable exercise (even if it is simply a walk around the block), and setting aside time for reflection and debriefing are all key ways to effectively navigate your university experience.

Seeking support when you need it. As mentioned earlier, knowing when to seek support is crucial. A study that I am involved with has highlighted that neurodiverse students in particular often delay seeking help until it is too late. Recognise when you require assistance and seek it early to ensure you receive the support you need.

The “third place”. Having a third place is crucial to maintaining focus, preventing academic burnout, and staying connected. The third place is distinct from your home (first place) and work or study environment

(second place). The third place can be a variety of different options, such as gyms, cafés, pubs, clubs, a band, a sporting club, a community group, and a book club. These spaces provide essential respite and connection outside of your usual routine. If you have not identified a third place yet, consider exploring different options to help regulate your emotions and enhance your connection to the broader community.

You can see from this first chapter, much of what is expected from you at university requires significant emotional and personal regulation, as well as an understanding of university expectations. Remember to be kind to yourself. You will not get everything perfectly right, and that is okay. Most learning happens through making mistakes.

Learning Activity 1.2 Redefining success [PDF]

Redefining what success means to you and finding ways to better balance your life are going to be important parts of managing yourself while you go through your university degree.

Complete the following steps to reflect and take practical steps:

1. What does/will success mean to you?

- Write down your current definition of success in 2-3 sentences.
- Reflect on whether this definition is rigid or flexible. If it feels rigid, note down ways you could adjust it to make it more flexible.

For example, if your definition of success is achieving top marks in all your subjects, you might adjust it to focus on giving your best effort and maintaining a healthy balance between study and other aspects of life.

2. How might you pivot your understanding of success if you do not reach your goals?

- Think of a time when something did not go as planned (e.g., a goal you did not achieve). Reflect on how you felt and how you responded.
- Now consider how you could approach a future situation where you do not meet a goal. Write down two alternative ways you could redefine success in that scenario.

3. What would be your 'third place' and what does it offer you?

A "third place" is a space outside of home, university or work, where you can unwind and connect with others.

- If you already have a third place, reflect on what it offers you and how it helps you recharge.

- If you do not have one, explore at least one potential third place, such as a park, café, library, or gym. After visiting, reflect on how it made you feel and whether it could support your sense of balance.

1.9 Key strategies from this chapter

- *Managing anxiety*: Acknowledge that anxiety is a normal part of transitioning and use support systems and strategies to manage it.
- *Address imposter syndrome*: Combat imposter syndrome by sharing feelings with peers or lecturers, focusing on facts, being self-compassionate, and challenging perfectionism.
- *Understanding university expectations*: Be proactive in understanding university expectations regarding attendance and participation.
- *Redefine success*: Adjust your definition of success from purely academic achievement to include personal growth and resilience.
- *Build a flexible routine*: Establish a flexible routine that allows for balancing academic and personal commitments.
- *Prioritise self-care*: Incorporate regular self-care practices such as exercise, nutrition, and reflection into your routine to maintain well-being.
- *Identify a 'Third Place'*: Find and engage with a 'third place' outside of home and university to unwind, recharge, and maintain emotional balance.
- *Seek support*: Recognise when you need support, and seek it early.

1.10 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have:

- examined the difficulties students face when transitioning to university, particularly for those of marginalised groups.
- discussed how anxiety impacts studying and highlighted its potential benefits and strategies for management.
- considered the key expectations related to attendance, participation, organisation, and conduct at university.
- began discussing ways to manage yourself effectively while at university.
- considered strategies for achieving balance between study, work, and personal life, emphasising the importance of flexibility and self-care.

1.11 Reflection questions

- What are your primary motivations for attending university? How do they influence your approach to your studies?
- What specific challenges do you anticipate facing as you transition to university life? How might you prepare for these challenges?
- How does anxiety manifest for you in academic settings? What strategies have you found effective in managing it?
- What expectations do you have about university, and how do they align with the expectations outlined in this chapter?
- Reflect on your current self-management strategies. What works well for you, and what areas need improvement?
- Identify your 'third place' or a potential 'third place.' How can this space contribute to your overall well-being and success at university?

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I would love to hear your thoughts on this chapter, [share your feedback](#).

CHAPTER 2: INDEPENDENT LEARNING AND SELF-EFFICACY

Liam Frost-Camilleri

Learning Objectives

- Define independent learning and discuss its importance in a university setting.
- Understand and develop strategies to foster self-efficacy and a growth mindset in a university context.
- Identify and evaluate different support systems available at universities.
- Discuss the role of lecturers, tutors, and external support networks in student success.

2.1 Independent learning

Independent learning is an all-encompassing term that contains a wide variety of skills when it comes to learning at university. Most definitions point to autonomy, or a self-led approach to learning that prioritises the student ‘taking control’. For example, Holec (1991) states that independent learning is “the ability to take charge of one’s learning” (p. 3), whereas Levy and Treacey (2019) claim that “a successful independent learner is one who has adjusted to the culture of the university” (p. 34). This taking control involves deciding what, when, and how to learn. It involves being able to evaluate yourself and reflect on what you have learnt, and it also requires you to create your own objectives. That is why there are so many definitions of ‘independent learning’ and why they are all correct in different ways. The term highlights how different learning at university is compared to secondary school or other forms of education.

To be a student who is independent, or who ‘takes control’ of their learning, it is important to consider the expectations of the tasks that require completion. If a course has an essay as an assessment task (which is very common at university), then a variety of different independent skills need to be drawn upon to complete it effectively. **Research** will be required to find suitable material for the essay. **Reading** and **analytical skills** will be used to decide what is and is not relevant to the assessment. Understanding the **conventions** of **academic writing**, such as how to use citations and the expected language of an essay, is also important. Consideration needs to be made to the **planning**, **structure** and the **main purpose** of the assessment to ensure it responds appropriately to the question or topic well. A student would even have

to consider **how to manage** the task of writing the assessment by **predicting** how long it would take to produce.

All of these tasks (and more) are involved in becoming an independent learner, but these aspects can change based on what is expected of each university assessment. For example, group work or presentations require a whole different set of skills, including **communication**, **people** and **conflict resolution** skills. It could also be argued that class activities or the type of class (lecture, tutorial, workshop etc.) require independent skills in **listening**, effective **note-taking**, **asking insightful questions** and **self-reflection**, all at different levels depending on the expectations of the class.

When analysed closely, it seems that being an independent learner requires many new skills that most novice students might not yet possess. While being an independent learner is a university expectation, there is also an understanding that these skills are still in development and will take time before they become effective. This is where reflecting on your skills and identifying the areas you would like to develop or improve upon can be especially helpful. Using a blanket term such as ‘help’ when asking for support fails to pinpoint the actual problem you might be having. However, if you have reflected on your abilities and determined that you need to work on your note-taking skills for example, then you can be more specific about the support you need. Thus, it is very important to ask yourself the following question often: “What could make me a better independent learner?” Remember that while becoming or being an independent learner requires you to be autonomous, you do have a great deal of support behind you. Being an independent learner is not the same as being on your own and not seeking support.

2.2 Support

Most universities have different levels of support available. The most obvious support comes from the lecturers and tutors that you encounter, but they are primarily employed to work through the content of the course or unit with you. They can clarify something that does not make sense to you or help you refine your analysis, questions, and response to assessments. It is important to note that in most universities, lecturers do not accept drafts of assessments but can talk more generally about your approach. Once the student’s needs move away from content and towards elements like study skills, lecturers and tutors might not be the best people to engage with.

Generally, universities have a support network for the ‘soft skills’¹ required, usually run by a student body, library, or student support space. Many of these networks are comprised of former students or people who specialise in student support. If you have or suspect you have a learning disability, there is also a disability support service to engage with. It is important to consider the many supports Universities offer students, as they may be of benefit to you. A general inquiry will usually point you in the right direction.

It is also worth mentioning other supports you might be able to engage with outside of the university.

1. Interestingly, there is a movement towards calling soft skills ‘power skills’. The connotation of soft skills is that they are lesser or less important and using the term power skills is meant to rectify this.

Local librarians, anybody you know who has attended university, teachers, nurses, or anybody who has studied before may offer valuable insights into how they navigated becoming an independent learner.

2.3 The 'perfect' student

The topic of 'independent learner' is often referred to as 'becoming' or 'being' an independent learner. However, given the complexity of the term and the fact that some days we can be our best selves and other days we can struggle to analyse, read, listen, or comprehend what is going on, it is better to think of independent learning as something we **pursue** or **strive** for rather than something that we are. The concept that there is a perfect student who always understands everything happening in class or in their assessment pieces is, to put it plainly, a myth. Every student has had to work on their skills in different ways, and some students might have to work on developing certain skills a little more than others. You may have a vision of the student you wish to be, but be kind to this version of yourself. Misunderstanding a reading or not participating in one of your classes is not a cause for concern. Many students who are starting university feel that they need to change much of themselves before starting and become highly disciplined and exceptional students. Being this studious can be quite unrealistic once you become aware of the new set of skills required to navigate university. Try to meet yourself somewhere in the middle: Strive to be the best student that you can be, but forgive yourself if you fail to reach the 'perfect' student ideal that you have in your mind.

[Learning Activity 2.1 Self-Reflection and Planning Exercise \[PDF\]](#)

One of the important parts of self-reflection is being able to take stock of what you do well and what you can develop further. In the interest of developing your abilities, use the following list of skills to reflect on your current ability and how you might develop it further:

- Written and other communication skills
- Research skills
- People skills
- Thinking skills
- Task management skills
- Time management skills
- Confidence
- Resilience
- Organisational skills

2.4 The importance of questions in learning

In most courses at university, beginning the class with one question and ending it with another 20 is usually a sign that the class is working well. Most lecturers want you to think deeply about what you are learning, and discussing potential solutions to questions can help you to explore the content effectively. At university, statements are often turned into questions to help reframe and analyse course or unit content.

For instance, if we take the concept of independent learning and frame it as a question: “What is an independent learner?” We might try to answer the question by highlighting autonomy. The question could then be asked, “What does it mean to be autonomous?” After creating a list of what it is to be autonomous: you could ask the question, “What do *I* need to develop to be autonomous?” You might settle on asking more questions in class, which could lead to the question, “What type of questions should I ask?” and so on. The point is, questions lead to more questions, which might be uncomfortable when you are a student, but asking questions at university is seen as part of the learning journey. Consider what your courses or units are about and what questions you can keep alive in your mind to help you maintain interest and refine your understanding.

2.5 What university classes look like

Traditionally, most university classes consisted of lectures and tutorials. Lectures are classes with many students where the lecturer quickly covers the content and the students are expected to listen and take notes. There are usually few opportunities to ask questions in a lecture. Tutorials, on the other hand, are smaller groups of students and typically involve asking questions and discussing the lecture content with a tutor. The main advantage of a lecture is the ability to cover content quickly, while the main advantage of a tutorial is being able to discuss the content and ask questions. However, with more people now attending university, many institutions have begun to change their format. Most classes are now workshop or seminar-based, which involve small group work, elements of a lecture, and some interactive activities. Other types of classes include labs, where you conduct experiments or do hands-on work, and placements, where you connect with a workplace that grades you on your performance. Some universities offer purely online or blended (that is, blended between face-to-face and online) models of instruction, better catering for students with family and/or work commitments. Understanding the format of your classes will help you successfully navigate them, so try to have a conversation with your lecturer about what is expected of you in class.

Universities offer choices of study modes for students. Generally, these are divided into on-campus and online models, with a blended or hybrid model where you can attend classes purely online or attend only a few sessions throughout the semester. Each mode offers unique challenges and advantages. On-campus study gives you personal interaction, a structured environment, and direct access to campus facilities, but can become challenging with time constraints and the cost of travel. Online study provides flexibility in your study by making it self-paced and always accessible online, but can present challenges of isolation and the increased need for self-discipline. A recent study found that attitudes towards online study had a

significant impact on student engagement and participation (Ferrer et al., 2022). It is important that you are clear on which study mode would work for you and why. If your attitude toward study is positive, and you enjoy the process of learning, then you may successfully navigate online study well. If you enjoy discussing content, making connections, and want to make more use of what the university offers, then on-campus study may be a better option.

2.6 Self-efficacy

The term ‘self-efficacy’ is usually confused with ‘self-esteem’, but there is an important difference. Self-esteem is how you *feel* about yourself, whereas self-efficacy is the *belief* you have in yourself. With these definitions in mind, you could have high self-esteem (feel very good about yourself) and low self-efficacy (do not believe in your abilities) at the same time. There is an old saying that seems to have turned into a punchline rather than a meaningful phrase; the idea that ‘whether you believe you can or you believe you can’t; you’re right’, more than captures self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy has been linked to people’s ability to succeed in several research studies (Ayllón et al., 2019; Zajacova et al., 2005; Van Dinther et al., 2011). It appears that believing you can succeed is more effective than simply having high self-esteem. The good news is it has been proven that you can develop your self-efficacy. Being more engaged by preparing before class, joining in on class discussions, reflecting on your abilities and performance, managing your time well, and taking care of yourself are all strategies that you can build your self-efficacy. The important point to remember is that these skills take time to develop, understand and apply.

Figure 2 illustrates how Bandura (1977) believed judgements about self-efficacy are formed.

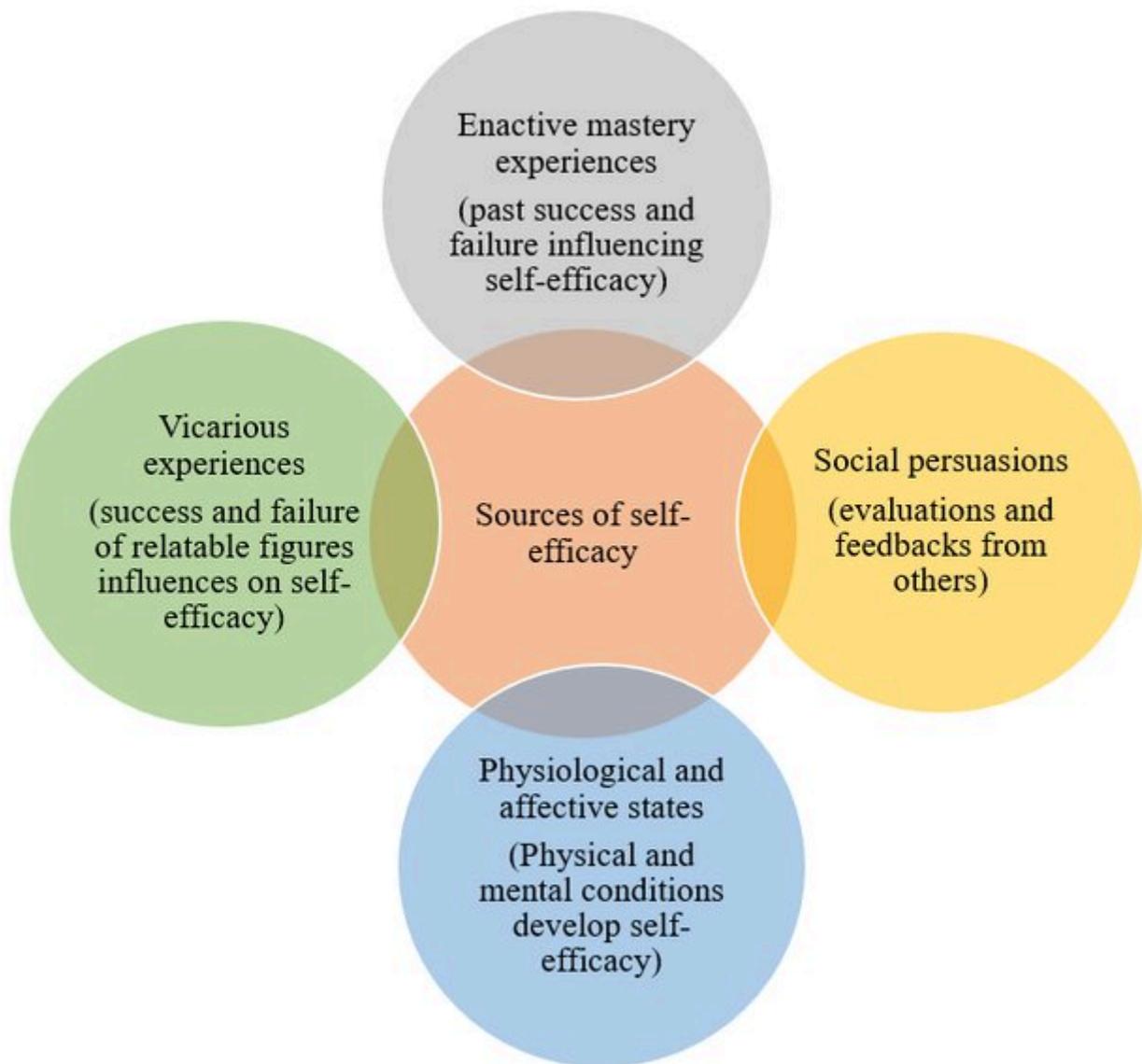


Figure 2. Sources of Information for Self-Efficacy. Bandura's example of judgements of self-efficacy, From "A framework for enhancing English as a foreign language teachers' teaching self-efficacy", by Z. Zhang & A. J. B. Sihes, (2023), *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13 (8), p.643 (<https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i8/18086>). CC BY 4.0

The interesting thing about these judgements of self-efficacy is how they can depend on our interpretation of them. Past experiences, like a school oral presentation that went wrong, may convince you that you are bad at oral presentations. The memory of embarrassment might create anxiety every time you are expected to present. Observing others performing poorly in a similar task can also influence your self-perception. This phenomenon is known as modelling by others. The coaching you receive may also impact your self-efficacy judgement. For instance, if your parents expressed dislike for oral presentations, you might internalise those beliefs. Lastly, because you were so anxious about the presentation, your physiological or emotional response was pushed to the limit. This self-doubt and emotional distress create a physiological feedback loop: "I do not enjoy being in front of people and having to speak".

While these judgements might sound a little bleak, we can equally adopt positive judgements of self-

efficacy in the same scenario. Drawing from past experiences may motivate you to avoid repeating the same mistakes. Thus, you practice and develop a better sense of how to present effectively. You might watch videos of great presentations and use them as models to enhance your own skills. Even if your parents expressed their dislike for presentations, you approached the situation with curiosity and resolved not to repeat their mistakes. As you gained an understanding of how to manage or even harness your anxiety, you learned to calm yourself effectively and perhaps even use your anxiety as a motivator to improve your presentation skills.

With these different perspectives on the same situation, you can see how judgements about self-efficacy can vary widely. The key takeaway is that self-efficacy can be developed, and one of the most effective methods to achieve this is by cultivating a positive mindset.

2.7 Mindsets

Carol Dweck wrote a book called *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* in 2006. In it, she discussed various individuals in business, sports, and education, illustrating how they exhibited elements of either a fixed mindset or a growth mindset.

A fixed mindset is evident in people who tend to take criticism very harshly, give up easily and often exclaim ‘there’s just no point in trying’ or ‘see? I knew that I would fail.’ Individuals with a fixed mindset believe that intelligence is fixed and cannot be changed, or they attribute their failures to external factors. In other words, you are born with your abilities and they cannot be improved upon. This mindset can lead to behaviours that discourage taking on challenges, avoid responsibility, and inhibit personal growth.

People with a growth mindset, however, tend to handle criticism more positively. They understand that feedback on their work is not a reflection of their personal worth but an opportunity to improve their abilities. Those with a growth mindset might say things like ‘I can grow from my mistakes’ or ‘if I make a mistake, I can just keep trying’ or ‘I don’t know how to do it yet.’ They believe that intelligence and abilities can be developed through effort and perseverance. Embracing a growth mindset encourages individuals to welcome challenge, take ownership of their learning and strive for self-improvement.

When it comes to studying at university, it is beneficial to view mindsets as a spectrum rather than being strictly growth or fixed. Few people embody a purely fixed or growth mindset across all aspects of their lives; instead, individuals may exhibit a growth mindset in some areas and a fixed mindset in others. However, a growth mindset can be cultivated and enhanced over time, often through mindful language use. Dweck (2014) suggests that adding ‘yet’ to defeatist statements can foster a growth mindset. For instance, ‘I can’t do this yet’ instils hope and motivation to persist when contrasted with ‘I can’t do this’.

Developing a growth mindset requires conscious effort. It involves recognising and reframing negative self-talk, a process that may take time and persistence. But know that this effort will be well spent in time.

2.8 Self-talk

Self-talk refers to the internal dialogue that we have while we are learning. This internal narrative is

incredibly powerful and can influence how we approach tasks and how we perceive ourselves and our abilities. Listening to our self-talk with curiosity is one way that we can start to influence it, making it more of an ally in our journey than something that can squash our motivation.

Positive self-talk can include affirmation and supportive thoughts that encourage us to persevere, build confidence, and aim for self-improvement. Consider these sentences and the impact they may have on your confidence when facing an assessment:

“I may not understand this right now, but I will figure it out with effort and time.”

“Every time I try, I get one step closer to success.”

“I trust that I will understand this in time.”

These statements can foster a growth mindset which will place you in good stead to approach the challenges presented by the university environment. Regularly using affirmations, identifying and reframing your negative self-talk, visualising your successes, and focusing on your effort rather than outcomes will help you to focus on what is most important about your learning journey.

Learning Activity 2.2 Growth Mindset Dice [PDF]

Using a six-sided or online dice, roll and complete the corresponding mindset activity.

1 = Write down a time that you made a mistake and what you learned from it.

2 = Explain why making mistakes is a good thing for your learning.

3 = Write down a challenge you had today and how you overcame it.

4 = Explain some ways you can motivate yourself when things get difficult.

5 = Write down four mantras you can say to yourself when you are feeling discouraged.

6 = Write down strategies that you see/hear other people using and think about how you might be able to adapt their methods to suit you.

2.8 Key strategies from this chapter

- *Clarify content:* Speak to your lecturers and tutors often to help you clarify the content and refine your understanding.
- *Engage with university resources:* Seek support from student bodies, libraries, and student support services to strengthen study habits and develop soft skills.
- *Develop self-efficacy:* Engage in activities that promote confidence, such as participating in class discussions and preparing for classes.
- *Reflect on past successes:* Revisit your positive experiences to build a mental record of your capabilities.
- *Practice resilience:* Focus on effort and persistence rather than immediate outcomes.
- *Welcome challenges:* Instead of avoiding challenges, see them as chances to grow.
- *Use affirmations:* Regularly remind yourself of your ability to overcome challenges.
- *Develop a growth mindset:* Recognise that your abilities and strengths are not fixed. They can grow with effort and reflection.

2.9 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have:

- identified that independent learning involves taking control of one's learning, including setting objectives, evaluating progress, and self-reflection. Remember, this is a pursuit, the perfect student is a myth.
- examined a variety of skills required to be an independent learner, such as research, analysis, writing, time management, communication, and conflict resolution.
- considered the various support offered through universities, including: lecturers, tutors, student bodies, libraries, and disability services that are all worth exploring.
- examined how asking questions helps to develop a deep understanding and active engagement in class content.
- considered the variety of different class types at university, including lectures, tutorials, workshops, labs, and placements, each with different expectations and methods of engagement.
- determined that self-efficacy is the belief in one's abilities and can be developed through engagement, reflection, time management, and self-care.
- examined how a growth mindset fosters resilience and a willingness to embrace

challenges, while a fixed mindset can hinder personal and academic growth.

2.10 Reflection questions

- How would you define independent learning in your own words?
- What are some strategies that you can develop to take better control of your learning?
- Identify the support you might need in completing your university studies. Given the variety of support systems at university, are there any that you have not accessed that could help you on your journey?
- What steps can you take to improve your self-efficacy in an academic context?
- Can you identify a situation where you exhibited a fixed mindset? How might you reframe this using a growth mindset?

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I would love to hear your thoughts on this chapter, [share your feedback](#).

CHAPTER 3: DISCOVERING YOURSELF AS A LEARNER

Liam Frost-Camilleri

Learning Objectives

- Recognising and reflecting on your learning strengths and areas of improvement
- Challenging fixed perceptions of ability and growth
- Managing learning strategies to apply practical solutions to manage tasks, yourself, and relationships
- Embracing productive struggle as a means to grow and adapt

3.1 Who are you as a learner?

Most of the research published concerning getting to know who you are as a learner is focused on how educational institutions support students (or, how they do not). Some research highlights the importance of an accessible learning environment for students (Closs et al., 2021), while others explore the link between creating a sense of belonging and helping students remain engaged (Waite et al., 2023). While institutes such as universities have a responsibility to cater to your engagement and learning needs, the challenge that every student faces when attending university is discovering and understanding themselves as a learner. This understanding can then be leveraged to make your time in higher education more enjoyable and successful.

This question of ‘who are you as a learner?’ is more complex than most people tend to realise. Due to some poor practices with theory, most students will call themselves ‘visual learners’ or ‘hands-on’ learners, when there is no empirical evidence to support the concept of learning styles at all (Frost-Camilleri, 2021). In fact, some researchers criticise the learning styles idea because it makes learning appear too simplistic (Nancekivell et al., 2020). When not referring to learning styles, many students tend to think about their learning in terms of what they are good at and what they feel they struggle with. These students will say things like: “I’ve always been a good reader” or “I’ve never been good at maths”, but these statements are quite finite or fixed and can make it difficult to challenge, change, and grow your understanding and skill.

In many ways, the most important thing about becoming someone who is aware of who they are as a learner is to adopt a less fixed perspective.

Many students equate a strength with something that they enjoy, but enjoyment does not always equal strength. One of the best ways to determine a strength is when it is highlighted by others. It is worth reflecting on the advice and praise you have received about the things that you have done well. A similar point can be made for areas of improvement as your teachers, friends, and family can indicate where improvement is needed. Accepting the perspectives of others can be emotionally confronting, but it is an important aspect of academic growth.

The truth is, however, that every aspect of yourself as a learner can be developed, no matter how brilliant or horrible you are at something. An excellent writer can still refine their writing in the same way that a person who has difficulty understanding mathematical concepts can develop their knowledge. A good metaphor for this concept is the mathematical symbol pi (π). See figure 3.

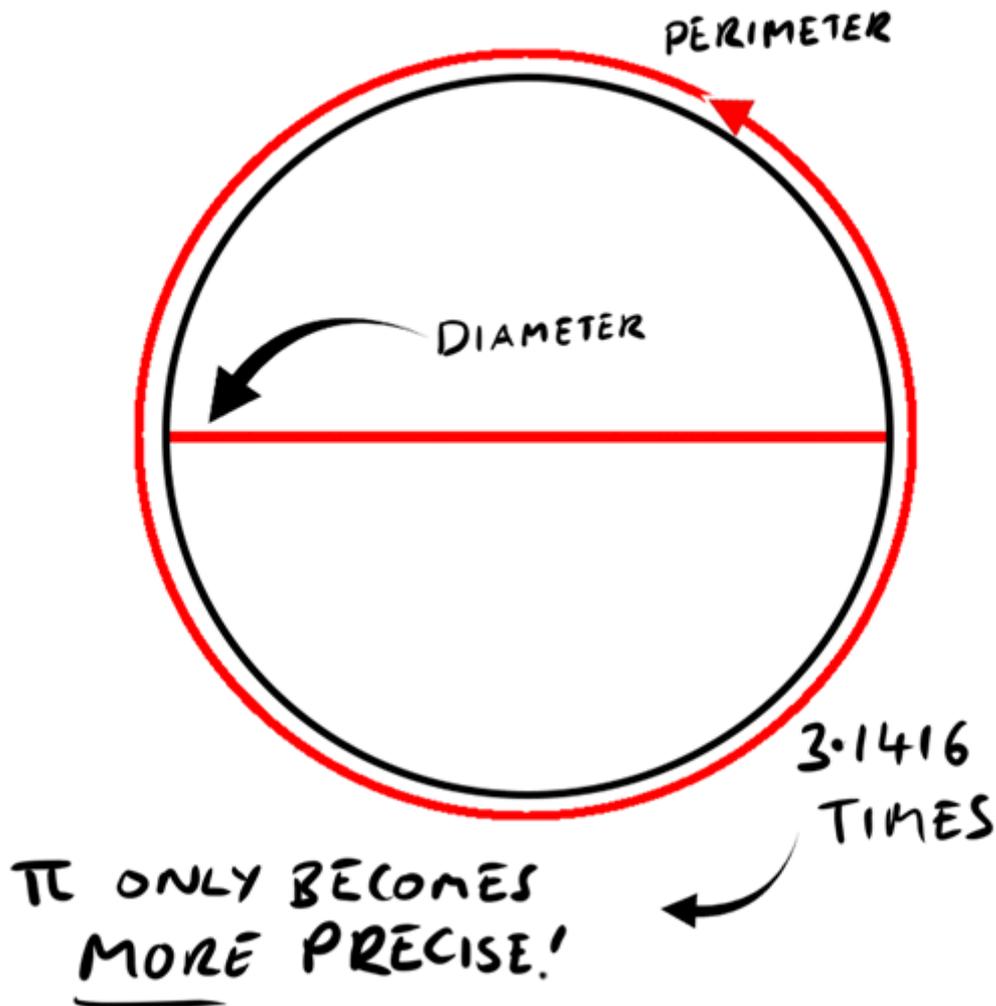


Figure 3. How to Find Pi (π). A diagram of the relationship between a circle's diameter and pi (π). From How to Find Pi (π), [Infographic], by Liam Frost-Camilleri, 2025. [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

To find π you need to know the diameter of a circle. The diameter is a straight line that runs through the centre of a circle. If you take the diameter and wrap it around the perimeter (the line running along the outside) of the circle, it will wrap around 3.1416 times. The important part of π is that the number never ends and does not have a pattern. If you tried to remember every digit after the decimal, you would never finish remembering numbers.

π never ends; it just becomes more accurate. Thinking of your skills as a never-ending patternless list of numbers is a good way to remember that no matter how precise or 'good' you think your skills are, they can always be developed to become more precise, just like π . This also means that there is no such thing as doing something 'perfectly'; there is only how far you have come on your learning journey, or rather, how far you would *like* to go on your journey.

Moving your thinking from the fixed idea that you simply have unmovable strengths and weaknesses, or that you are a particular kind of learner is a difficult shift to make for many students. Looking to understand concepts straight away, or attaining a High Distinction on your first try are rare achievements. Additionally, many students will see skill development as ‘fixing’ the parts of themselves that are not ‘good enough’. We are not ‘fixing’ ourselves, because nothing is broken. Clearly, if you are enrolled, then you are good enough to do the course. Getting to know who you are as a learner helps you to be more self-compassionate while you make small improvements. Knowing yourself also means you can better understand the individual work you need to do to achieve your goals.

3.2 Being honest with yourself

Keeping your learning journey in mind while you try to identify your areas of strengths and/or improvement can be difficult, as many students are trained to think of their skills as finite and fixed. If you received a series of reports that highlighted how much you struggled with mathematics over the years for example, it can be very difficult to feel like you can improve these skills. However, being honest with yourself is extremely important for your growth.

One effective way of getting to know yourself is to have conversations with the people who know you. Talking to your friends, partner, mentors, colleagues, other students, teachers, and parents while listening intently can be confronting and may make you question your identity as it challenges the story you have been telling yourself. It is, therefore, very important that you go gently into this area of getting to know yourself through the eyes of others while keeping an open mind.

To keep your conversations on track in terms of growth, try to use more neutral or positive language when discussing yourself with the people who know you. Instead of asking ‘what am I bad at?’ ask, ‘what areas could I improve upon?’. Additionally, ask some follow up questions that relate to *how* these skills can be improved. A question like, ‘how do you think I could get better at...?’ could help you with some strategies to develop your skills. Similarly, when discussing your strengths, ask what you do that makes it a strength. For instance, if someone tells you that you are an effective writer, you can follow up with, ‘what about my writing makes me effective?’.

For some people, answering questions like this can be difficult, so it would be best not to force the issue. Viewing this task as merely an exercise to see what you might focus on next might not require an intense interrogation, but the conversations can be quite interesting and freeing as you learn more about yourself as a learner.

3.3 Taking stock of your skills

Taking stock of your learner skillset as it relates to university is an important step toward getting to know yourself. We tend to break this task into three categories: forging positive relationships, task management, and self-management.

Positive relationships are important as they give you a chance to discuss your ideas and develop your

understanding of course or unit content. At university you will encounter people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, making the ability to build a quick and lasting rapport very useful. Try to forge these relationships by asking your peers questions and listening intently to their responses. Get to know your peers and try to remember that every person in your class is a resource that can help you to further develop your understanding. Group work is also an important part of attending university, which means skills in negotiation, discussion, and working with others will be especially helpful (negotiating group work is covered in more detail in Chapter 8).

The ability to manage tasks is an extremely important aspect of being successful at university. As you will have no doubt noticed by now, lecturers and tutors will not spend much time motivating you to complete weekly readings or any other tasks, leaving you in charge of getting all you can out of your university experience. Consider your usual habits when completing tasks: Do you know how to research? Do you usually understand what assessment tasks are asking you to do? Do you know how to move between different online platforms and navigate different websites? Can you navigate assessment criteria to determine how best to approach a task? Answering questions such as these is crucial for determining your skill level. By evaluating your strengths and identifying areas where you may need support, you can better plan and manage the process of successfully completing university tasks. It is also important to recognise that different tasks require different skills, so be sure to focus on the specific skills needed for each task to ensure success.

Being able to manage yourself requires a better understanding of who you are and your relative strengths. Think about the process you tend to undertake when completing tasks. Some students will need a dedicated workspace that needs to be quiet and distraction-free. Others will need music and noise to keep their motivation going. Some students need to procrastinate to ‘think’ about the tasks they are completing, while others block out dedicated time in their calendar or they will simply not find the time. It is worth reflecting on what helps and what hinders you when you are thinking about working on your university tasks.

Working on developing positive relationships, how you manage tasks, and how you manage yourself are effective ways of ensuring you are maintaining a positive mindset of improvement. Try to experiment with ways that you can improve in these areas and stay curious while you do.

Learning Activity 3.1 Self-assessment [PDF]

Rate the following questions from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) to help you reflect on your strengths and areas of improvement. Be sure to be honest in your responses and create an action plan on how you can improve yourself further.

- I feel confident in my ability to grasp new concepts quickly.

- I receive positive feedback from others on my work regularly.
- I tend to understand the feedback that I receive.
- I can easily explain complex ideas to others.
- I can remain focused on my studies.
- I am often motivated to study.
- I can organise my time effectively.
- I can organise my space to help me study better.
- I use a variety of study methods when studying.
- I often participate in classes.
- I ask clarifying questions in class when I am not sure of something.
- I feel confident talking in front of the class.
- I know how to navigate group work tasks.
- I know how to set time aside to complete required tasks.
- I approach revision and preparation for tasks in a structured manner.
- I set clear goals for improving my strategies.
- I actively seek out and use support resources.
- I regularly review and adjust my study plans based on my progress.
- I have a clear action plan for addressing my areas of improvement.
- I find reading and analysing text easy.
- I find writing and explaining my thoughts easy.

3.4 Getting close to the course content

Some of what has been covered in this chapter can be quite overwhelming. Feeling worried or anxious about the process (further addressed in Chapter 9), is completely normal, especially if it is the first time you have studied at university and you want to be successful. However, there are some practical ways that you can develop your skills to help you better engage with your course or unit and alleviate some of this anxiety. Preparing before class, participating in the class, and immersing yourself in the course or unit are three strategies that are quite effective. Just remember to leverage the strengths that you have acknowledged above when implementing these strategies.

Your goal should be staying active and making the most of your class time. Aim to always ask clarifying questions when you do not understand something (unless, of course, it is in a lecture and there is no opportunity to ask questions; in this case, write the question down so you can ask it during the tutorial, or write it on an online discussion board forum). You may be a student who is already comfortable with talking in front of a class, but if you are not, it is important to become comfortable with this. Remember that higher education is not like secondary school. University classes, whether on campus or online are much less worried about the social pecking order and much more interested in understanding and growth.

Engage in discussions, question your beliefs and values, and seek clarification from your lecturer on anything you are unsure about. The more you interact, the richer your university experience will be. It is also important to focus on the weekly activities and readings set by your lecturers. By looking into these tasks you will find it much easier to engage in class content and develop your self-efficacy.

Immersing yourself in the course or unit means exploring everything it has to offer, including the assessments, readings, topics, and general concepts. Getting to know the course can be as simple as reading any material that discusses the assessments and the content. While reading, get into the habit of recording any questions that you might have, so you are ready to discuss them in class. Making a list of relevant vocabulary used in the course with definitions might also be helpful in successfully navigating the content. This is called a 'glossary of terms' and will help you to develop your academic language. Immersing yourself can also involve getting to know the finer details of the course, like the thinkers who first discussed the theories that you are examining. Ask yourself if you know who this person is/was, what their areas of interest were/are? Why did they make the contribution that they did? What does this tell you about the content you are studying and your understanding of the world? And how does this theory fit into the overall course? These reflective questions are quite difficult to answer, but they can be used to help you develop a fascination and interest in the topic(s) that you are studying. Lecturers spend a lot of time thinking about their course or unit and developing content, so very little information is chosen by accident.

While being active and immersing yourself in the course are two effective ways of getting close to the content, you need to remember to cater for the person you are by making continual adjustments. If you are unable to attend every class, how might you address this? Are you the type of person who will read the readings in advance, or do you tend to be less organised? Do you daydream? Do you ask questions when you need to follow up? All of these aspects can be catered for and worked on, but it will take recognition, time, and effort. Practice self-compassion while you do what will no doubt be some uncomfortable things in the name of learning and growth.

Learning Activity 3.2 Skill inventory exercise [PDF]

Rate your proficiency levels for each of these skills (beginner/intermediate/advanced). There are helpful steps to help you enhance each skill you rate.

1. Building positive relationships. Rating: (beginner/intermediate/advanced)

Steps to Enhance:

- Engage in active listening during conversations.
- Participate in group activities or study groups.
- Seek opportunities for mentorship and collaboration.

2. Task management. Rating: (beginner/intermediate/advanced)

Steps to Enhance:

- Use a planner or digital tool to record deadlines.
- Break down larger tasks into smaller steps.
- Set clear goals and timelines for each task.

3. Self-Management. Rating: (beginner/intermediate/advanced)

Steps to Enhance:

- Develop a routine that includes breaks and self-care.
- Set realistic and achievable personal goals.
- Practice mindfulness or meditation to help manage stress.

4. Time management. Rating: (beginner/intermediate/advanced)

Steps to Enhance:

- Create a weekly schedule that includes study, work and leisure time.
- Identify time wasting activities and work to reduce them.
- Set specific time blocks for focused study without distractions.

5. Research. Rating: (beginner/intermediate/advanced)

Steps to Enhance:

- Familiarise yourself with academic databases and research tools.
- Check sources for relevance and peer review.
- Develop a systematic approach to note taking and organising your information.

6. Collaboration. Rating: (beginner/intermediate/advanced)

Steps to Enhance:

- Be open to participate in group projects and contribute to the group.
- Practice open and respectful communication with others.
- Develop skills in conflict resolution and negotiation.

7. Flexibility. Rating: (beginner/intermediate/advanced)

Steps to Enhance:

- Embrace change and seek opportunities for growth.
- Developing coping strategies for handling unexpected challenges.
- Reflect on past experiences of change and identity lessons that you have learned.

8. Problem solving. Rating: (beginner/intermediate/advanced)

Steps to Enhance:

- Practice breaking down complex problems into smaller components.
- Explore multiple solutions before deciding on the best approach.
- Reflect on problem-solving successes and areas of improvement.

9. Self-Reflection. Rating: (beginner/intermediate/advanced)

Steps to Enhance:

- Set aside time for self-reflection and journaling.
- Seek feedback from peers and lecturers on your progress and growth.
- Use self-reflection to inform your personal and academic development plans.

Use your response to these skills to plan for your development. You may be able to think of additional skills that you would also like to develop.

3.5 Productive struggle

To put it simply, learning is uncomfortable, but it is also an exciting challenge. The discomfort you experience while learning is the pain of personal growth, as new skills and knowledge change what you can do, how you see the world, and how you understand yourself. Not knowing what you are talking about or whether you truly understand something can be anxiety-provoking, but struggling with content is an important part of learning, especially at university. Grappling with ideas by discussing, asking and answering questions is generally known as ‘productive struggle’, and it is not only inevitable when studying at university, it is often desirable. Being comfortable with being uncomfortable is the key here. Spending time in the in-between state of not knowing and knowing is something that every student needs to develop a tolerance for. The research takes this one step further to talk about the “pedagogy¹ of discomfort”. The pedagogy of discomfort highlights the changes in emotional states (from curiosity to frustration or from interest to boredom for instance) while learning (Mills & Creedy, 2021). Sometimes this emotional state can be because the learning is challenging your biases (as can be seen in the study by Mills & Creedy, 2021), and sometimes it can be your own impatience with the learning process. But there are a few things you can do to engage better in productive struggle.

Now that you understand your strengths and areas of improvement better, try to be more transparent about the challenges you are going to face. Being aware of how difficult something is going to be will help you to maintain a positive or growth mindset toward the task at hand. Developing a growth mindset and reminding yourself that you do not understand ‘yet’ is also helpful when engaging in productive

1. Pedagogy is a teaching term which means ‘the method and practice of teaching’.

struggle. Allow yourself time to persevere and take a break when you feel yourself becoming frustrated. Understanding yourself and how you usually react here will help you to predict your emotional reaction before it becomes a problem, making you more efficient and helping you feel more positive about your learning and progress. Discuss your thinking process with others and really listen to the ways that they interpret what you are saying. Asking specific questions on what you do not understand will help you better discuss the content while meeting your learning needs. Essentially, you learn the most when you are challenged or feel discomfort.

Engaging in productive struggle and embracing the discomfort will develop your tolerance for uncomfortable situations and thinking. Many of your lecturers who conduct research will experience this almost daily, so it could be worth talking about it directly with your lecturer.

3.6 Weeding in the rain

Developing your skills as a learner is often compared with the care we take growing a garden. This is a great metaphor as it emphasises the patience required, the joy in seeing things bloom, and, perhaps most importantly, the time it takes to grow. Giving your garden the right amount of water, sun, and fertiliser will allow it to grow into something amazing. Too much sun and not enough water will dry it out which is very similar to trying to work without enough rest or play. Some soil is harder to grow in than others, so extra attention and care are needed to ensure that you are giving the plants (skills) the best chance at success. Again, this is very similar to our experiences and challenges when trying to learn. But the real test to your resilience is when you are forced to try to develop your skills when the conditions are not the best. Life will happen while you are trying to study, which can make it hard to focus on skill development. To continue the metaphor, if it is raining outside, will you spend time weeding your garden? Studies have shown that the most resilient people tend to focus on looking after themselves when things become more difficult, whereas less resilient people will start to drop many of the things they do for self-care. It turns out that weeding in the rain is not just a metaphor for looking after yourself and your skills when things get difficult, it is an important skill of resilience that ensures that you can continue to learn and grow.

A word of caution: while it is true that continuous improvement is an important aspect of attending university, make sure you pause occasionally to reflect and celebrate the successes of your achievements. This chapter is intended to break you out of a fixed mindset towards a compassionate understanding of skill growth. It is not intended for you to replace one difficult habit (thinking of yourself as fixed, broken, or unable to grow) with another (thinking of yourself as never good enough and constantly searching for the perfect student with no respite). Experiment and enjoy the process, but do not let it become an obsession.

3.7 Key strategies from this chapter

- *Recognise strengths and weaknesses:* Reflect on feedback from others and adopt a growth mindset to identify areas for improvement.
- *Challenge fixed perceptions:* Move away from seeing skills as unchangeable by understanding that all abilities can be developed.
- *Manage tasks effectively:* Break tasks into smaller steps, use planners, and focus on the skills required.
- *Embrace productive struggle:* Learn to embrace discomfort in learning by realising that it is part of the process.
- *Increase academic engagement:* Prepare for classes, engage in discussions, and explore the course or unit materials to deepen your academic engagement.
- *Celebrate growth:* Acknowledge your progress and take breaks to ensure learning is sustainable.

3.8 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have:

- developed an understanding of the self as a learner by focusing on growth rather than fixed abilities.
- understood that strengths and areas of improvement are not static and can be developed over time with reflection and effort.
- discussed how effective learning begins with productive struggle and embracing discomfort.
- examined the concept that managing tasks, the self, and fostering positive relationships can help develop an understanding of academic demands.

3.9 Reflection questions

- How do you currently perceive your strengths and areas of improvement as a learner? How might these perceptions influence your approach to studying?
- How do you typically respond to feedback from others? What strategies could you use to make feedback more constructive for your learning process?
- In what ways can you adapt a growth mindset to help you approach your learning and growth in a more positive way?
- Reflect on your current approach to managing academic tasks. What changes could you make to improve your task management and overall academic performance?
- How do you react to challenges and discomfort in your learning process? What steps can you take to better tolerate and utilise productive struggle?

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I would love to hear your thoughts on this chapter, [share your feedback](#).

CHAPTER 4: ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Liam Frost-Camilleri

Learning Objectives

- Understand the importance of essential academic skills: reading, note-taking, and time management.
- Develop strategies for effective and resilient academic reading.
- Explore what it is to make effective notes.
- Explore various time management techniques to enhance academic productivity.
- Cultivate personal habits that support academic success, including the development of reading resilience and self-efficacy.

There are some essential skills that you are expected to develop when you are studying a university course. This chapter focuses on three important ones: reading, note-taking, and time management. While there are other important skills to develop, they are beyond the scope of this textbook. The three skills discussed in this chapter, however, are essential for your academic success. Many aspects of these skills are quite personal, so experiment with what works for you and your situation.

4.1 Reading

Let us begin with the most commonly used essential skill at university: academic reading. Even if you are an experienced reader, you might find it difficult to navigate university texts. The reason these texts are so difficult is because everyday reading (the news, novels, social media etc.) is created to entertain, whereas higher education journal articles and textbooks are designed to inform and evaluate. So, unless you find these topics especially thrilling, the reading you must complete will test your ability to focus. One older but insightful piece of research on reading discusses the importance of building reading resilience, that is, the ability to read and interpret complex texts (Douglas et al., 2016). The research concluded that reading resilience can be developed when specific conditions are met. One of these conditions is close reading, which involves a careful examination of a text to uncover its deeper meanings and connections. This process requires analysing the text's structure and overall message while engaging in critical thinking about its

content. Therefore, close reading means actively engaging with the text, not just trying to memorise the content. To better engage with your texts, try the following strategies.

Reader voice

An effective strategy when reading academic texts is to develop a reader voice. A reader voice is like an inner dialogue that interacts about the text you are reading. The ‘voice’ you use might ask questions, reiterate what is being read, explain what you do not understand and/or generally comment on the reading. It is similar to what would happen if you went to the cinema and someone in the audience just kept talking about the film. Your thinking does not have to be said out loud, but if you keep asking questions, or even just vent your frustrations, you are, in fact, developing your reader voice. Try experimenting with this idea the next time you are reading something for your course or unit.

The purpose of reading

It is important to understand that starting a reading cold and without a central question or purpose can be extremely challenging. Before you begin, have an idea of the topic you are going to read about and even a couple of questions that you are trying to answer as this will help your focus. Being generally aware of the class requirements (assessments/class discussions) can also guide you toward the purpose of your reading. If you cannot finish this statement, “I am reading this to gain a better understanding of...”, then go back and review the assessment instructions or topic description.

Asking questions

The significance of questions is discussed above, but they are extremely important when you are learning to read academic texts. Having questions before you start reading keeps you focussed and will help you relate the content to your experiences and assessments. Most of the time your questions may be unanswerable, or you will simply end up with more questions, but this is the process of learning. Questions that spawn more questions are commonplace in academia, with most academics keeping important questions burning in their minds for years. Try not to underestimate the power of questions to boost your motivation and interest levels when reading and studying.

Previewing

Previewing is the process of understanding what the text is about before you start reading. Examine the headings, subheadings, pictures, and the structure of the text and make some conclusions about what it might explore. What questions might you be able to answer with this reading based on the information you have gathered?

Skimming

Skimming involves looking at small pieces of the text to find the themes and general ideas. As a starting point, many people will skim the abstract of an article to get a general sense of the themes. You could also read the first sentence of each section and look at any tables and graphs in the article. You may also wish to make a few notes while you do this, just to highlight the main points as you discover them. If you are skimming correctly, you should be able to tell if an article is suitable for your assessments at a glance. Try not to spend hours reading an article that you might not end up using.

Scanning

Scanning is used when you are looking for specific information. If you have a question to answer or you

are looking for information that will help you complete an assessment, try scanning through while keeping in mind what you are trying to answer or find out.

Detailed reading

Detailed reading requires looking closely at the text and only occurs once you have decided that the text is useful to you. It is usually done while taking notes and summarising the main points. It takes time to do well, so try to be patient. During detailed reading, your reader voice will really start to develop. Ask questions about the text and maintain a dialogue with what you are reading. What is it telling you and how might you use it to aid your understanding and the completion of your assessments?

Developing a reading habit

If you are developing your ability to read academic texts for the first time, you have probably noticed how different it is. The language used is quite academic and can include vocabulary that you have never seen before. Developing a reading habit is the same as any other habit formation. If you can spend a little time on that habit each day you will find it much easier to develop and grow. Reading academic texts for 10-15 minutes a day is better than not reading them at all. It could be worth putting on a timer to keep track, or maybe you could measure your progress based on the number of pages read each day. Put that time aside and try to align it with a reward. Rewards might include a coffee with a friend, or watching your favourite show. Try to choose a reward that makes you feel like you have achieved something.

4.2 Reading a journal article

Once you receive your first journal article to read, you may be confused about where to start. Most readers of articles do not read them in a linear or straightforward way, and, because of this, it is worth knowing the anatomy of journal articles or papers.

Journal articles usually contain the following sections: abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, discussion/results/findings, recommendations, and conclusion. While these are the main sections of most articles, you may also see other components, like hypothesis or case studies. These may be discipline-specific (a psychology article will offer a hypothesis for instance) and will be worth looking into as you become more familiar with journals.

Here is the aim for each section:

Abstract: The abstract is a short account of the article's main points. It will discuss why the article was written, what questions the author(s) were looking to answer and provide a brief summary of what the main findings were. You should have a clear understanding of what the article is going to tell you by reading the abstract.

Introduction: The introduction sets the scene for the article and will usually give historical or general information about the topic being explored. After reading the introduction, you should have a good understanding of the relevant background knowledge of the study.

Literature review: The literature review covers the current research relevant to the article's topic. In this section, the author(s) highlight the main arguments and points that researchers in the field have been making. This information is then used to build the case for the article that you are reading.

Methodology: The methodology discusses how the research was carried out, what ethics approval was

obtained, what the research questions are, and the type of data collected and why. If it is a research project involving participants, the methodology explains who the participants were, what they were asked, and under what circumstances they were chosen. If the purpose of the article you are reading is to review current literature, it will detail how the articles were sourced in this section.

Discussion/results/findings: Depending on the research conducted and the expectations of the publishing journal, the discussion, results, and findings may either be presented together or separated. The discussion highlights the main points arising from the research. Sometimes this section contains subheadings that highlight the points, making it easier to follow. The results and findings section interprets the points made in the discussion. In the results/findings section, the author(s) refer to the content of the literature review to highlight how their article builds on the findings of previous researchers.

Recommendations: In the recommendations section the author(s) explain the limitations of the research and offer additional questions that may be answered next. The recommendations section might also be used to suggest changes in policy or workplaces based on the research findings.

Conclusion: The conclusion of an article summarises the main points with reference to the scene set by the introduction.

Understanding the anatomy of a journal article helps you make informed reading choices. While the abstract is a great place to start, readers who are familiar about the topic might skim the discussion or recommendations section to see if the article is worth reading closely. The methodology might be the last section to be read as it focusses on how the research was conducted and would not typically be quoted in a first-year university essay.

These are quite formal reading strategies that you can utilise, but there are other elements that could support your growth here too. Try to create the right conditions to help you read, such as good light, a relaxed room with no noise (if that is your preference), and perhaps a drink bottle to stay hydrated. Adjust your reading speed to see if you can better understand the text when reading slowly or quickly. Keep a record of relevant vocabulary that you find challenging so you can refer back to it often and enhance your understanding. Make sure you choose an appropriate time to read, especially if you find early mornings or evenings difficult times to focus. Highlight sections that you believe are important, and consider annotating the reading (that is, make notes on the reading to better explain it) to help capture your thinking. Above all, try not to let frustration get the better of you. If you are feeling frustrated, it is better to calm down before continuing to read. When it comes to reading (or learning in general), regulation before expectation is always key.

[Learning Activity 4.1 Practising reading strategy \[PDF\]](#)

Practising reading strategy is the only way to become more proficient at it. Choose a complex academic text (e.g. a journal article or textbook chapter) and undertake a close reading. Annotate the text by identifying key arguments, evidence, and connections between ideas. Reflect on the deeper meanings you uncovered and how this analysis could inform your understanding of the content. It is also a good idea to discuss your reading with somebody else who has also done the reading to compare your understanding and adjust your approach.

4.3 Note-taking

For many years the gold standard for note-taking has been the Cornell note-taking method. Professor Walter Pauk of Cornell University developed the Cornell method to make sure the notes taken by his students were fit for purpose. Before we explore what the Cornell method involves, it is useful to discuss the aim of note-taking.

Most students do one of two things when they take notes. They either write down everything from the PowerPoint and everything the lecturer says or they write down a few out-of-context lines for the entire class. Neither of these approaches fulfill the role of note-taking. The purpose of taking notes in class, or on a reading, is to clarify understanding and to have something to refer back to when you are studying or writing assessments. Notes are written for your future self to read. The notes you take in class will often be written in such a way that only you will understand them. This is why sharing notes with other students is generally ineffective. But what information should you be recording? This is where the Cornell note-taking method is useful.

The beauty of the Cornell method lies in its clearly defined spaces that detail what should be recorded. To begin, rule up your page so there is a top section, a bottom section and two rectangles in the centre, with the right rectangle wider than the left. The top section is reserved for the date, title or name of the lecture or bibliographic details of a reading. The right-hand rectangle is for detailed notes in your own words and the left rectangle is used to pull out the main ideas, keywords, or questions from those notes. Lastly, the bottom rectangle is used to summarise the entire page or lecture.

CORNELL NOTETAKING

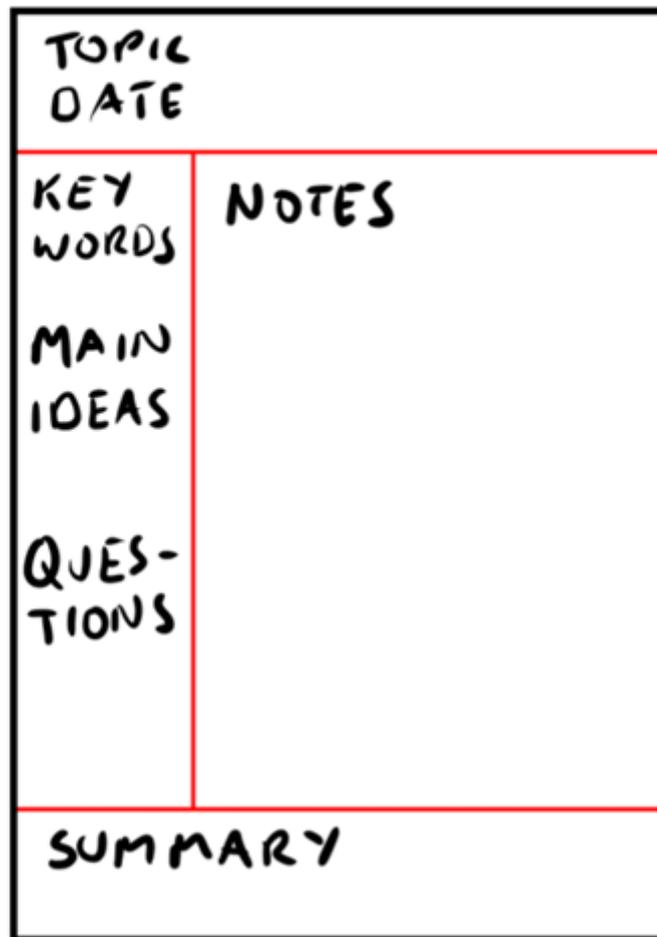


Figure 4. The structure of the Cornell notetaking system. From Cornell Notetaking Example [Infographic], by Liam Frost-Camilleri, 2025. [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Again, this method works because the clearly defined spaces guide you on what to include. Using this note-taking system means you can always find important information when completing assessments or studying. Some students like to build on this method by adding different elements to help them review their notes later on. Getting creative in your note-taking is a terrific way to ensure that your notes are meaningful and easily followed.

Using symbols, mind maps, sketches, or pulling out important vocabulary that you are struggling with are all excellent ways of keeping your notes relevant and specific to your learning and experience. Note-taking is not an exact science, so try to experiment with it to see what feels right for you. Some students even develop a shorthand with different symbols and quick writing methods to make note-taking faster and more efficient. If you like to take a lot of notes, this could be a good option for you.

[Learning Activity 4.2 Practise note-taking using the Cornell Method \[PDF\]](#)

The best way for you to become more comfortable with note-taking is to practise. Choose a video that you would like to learn more about (TED talks are generally a good idea for this activity, as they are like lectures) and try taking notes using the traditional Cornell Method and then in a more creative way. Make notes on how these methods are different and how you might be able to develop your note-taking skills further.

4.4 Time management

Whenever we fail at something or wish to spend more time doing something in particular, we tend to scorn ourselves for not managing our time well. Developing your time management takes time, but there are elements you can focus on while you develop the skill. The research tells us that focusing on priority and being conscientious will lead to better time management, and it seems especially important for part-time students due to an increased need to manage competing priorities (MacCann et al., 2012). This suggests that managing our time is more about managing our space, being organised, and taking responsibility than it is about creating a schedule or sacrificing a weekend to study (although, those elements are still important). Another more recent study found a link between developing self-efficacy and time management. According to Bargmann and Kauffeld (2023), self-efficacy, or a belief in your abilities (revisit Chapter 2 for more clarity), is more important than time management when beginning university study. This importance flips once a student develops self-efficacy, with a time management strategy becoming crucial. Similarly, another study found that students only experienced poor time management when there were competing responsibilities, like work or family (Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2023). For this reason, it is better to first focus on what is happening around your study time rather than the studying itself.

Hopefully after reading the first few chapters of this book, you are beginning to better understand who you are as a learner and the things that help you to focus and achieve your goals. With this understanding in mind, it is worth reflecting on ways that you can change your space or routine to support your learning. This can be anything from moving your laptop to be with your keys so you do not forget to take it with you, to changing the layout of your study so you are less distracted. Think deeply about the barriers to your learning and try to employ practical ways to solve some of the issues that you are facing.

It can be helpful to think about time management as energy management. The beauty of energy management is its focus on aligning tasks with your natural energy fluctuations. This is why it is so important to know yourself as a learner and work within the confines of your energy rhythms. Knowing how much energy a task will take is also beneficial, as it can help you make decisions concerning how your

time is spent before and after its completion. Rather than simply scheduling tasks, focus on optimising your energy levels by incorporating breaks, conserving energy when necessary while prioritising nutrition, movement, and rest.

Once you have started to address some of your focus, energy management, and learning barriers, you can move on to using specific time management tools. Perhaps the most successful time management tool is called the Pomodoro technique. This technique seems to work especially well for students with focus issues such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The Pomodoro technique was developed by Francesco Cirillo who was trying to combat his own procrastination while studying. He named the technique after his Pomodoro (the Italian word for tomato) shaped timer that he used to time himself.

To use this method, choose a task to be completed, then set a timer for 25 minutes. This 25-minute block of time is called a “Pomodoro”. While the timer is running, focus only on the task at hand and remove all potential distractions. When the timer rings, have a five-minute break. It is important to get up from your desk during this break time. Perhaps do some stretches or go for a short walk. You then complete the cycle (25 minutes of focus followed by a five-minute break) two to four more times. After this, you take a longer break of 15 to 30 minutes.

Importantly, you need to avoid all distractions during the Pomodoro’s. Do not check your phone, email, social media, or the time during a Pomodoro. If you are interrupted, let the person know that you are in the middle of something and that you will talk to them when the Pomodoro is complete.

When first completing a Pomodoro you might find it difficult to stick to the 25 minutes; feel free to make any adjustments you need. A 15-minute Pomodoro might be more achievable at first. There are several Pomodoro apps or websites that allow you to adjust the time of your Pomodoro’s and breaks.

The beauty of the Pomodoro technique is its short time frame. Instead of being overwhelmed by a longer task, committing to 25 minutes of focused study at a time can feel more achievable. Many students developing their skills in time management find this quite appealing. Additionally, the Pomodoro technique can help you to organise how long something might take you to complete. Writing an essay might take you 15 Pomodoro’s for instance. Scheduling those Pomodoro’s throughout the week might stop you feeling overwhelmed.

The Pomodoro technique touches on an important aspect of time management, and that is dedicated time to a task. There is no need to have every hour of every day planned out as this ignores your motivation levels and could put your mental health in jeopardy. But planning to spend concentrated time on tasks while removing distractions and giving yourself the best chance to focus is a skill worth developing.

After some time, you can adjust the length of your study to suit your own personal needs and challenges. Here are some other time management tools that you might find useful:

Eat that frog

Eat that frog is the idea that you choose the most pressing or challenging task first. Completing the most difficult task first is said to have the most positive impact on your progress. Some students also have a ‘difficult hour’, where they choose one hour a week to complete the difficult tasks that were left incomplete.

Eisenhower Matrix

This tool is great for prioritising your tasks. There are 4 quadrants, Urgent and Important; Important, Not Urgent; Urgent, Not Important and; Not Urgent, Not Important. Where the task lands helps you

to choose what to do. Anything Urgent and Important should be done right away, while Important, Not Urgent tasks should be scheduled. Urgent, Not Important tasks are usually delegated to someone else (probably more important when you start working) and anything that is Not Urgent, Not Important would simply be deleted. The aim would be to avoid elements falling into the Urgent and Important category, as it can become quite stressful and is difficult to maintain long term. The colourful box below is a good guide to this tool.

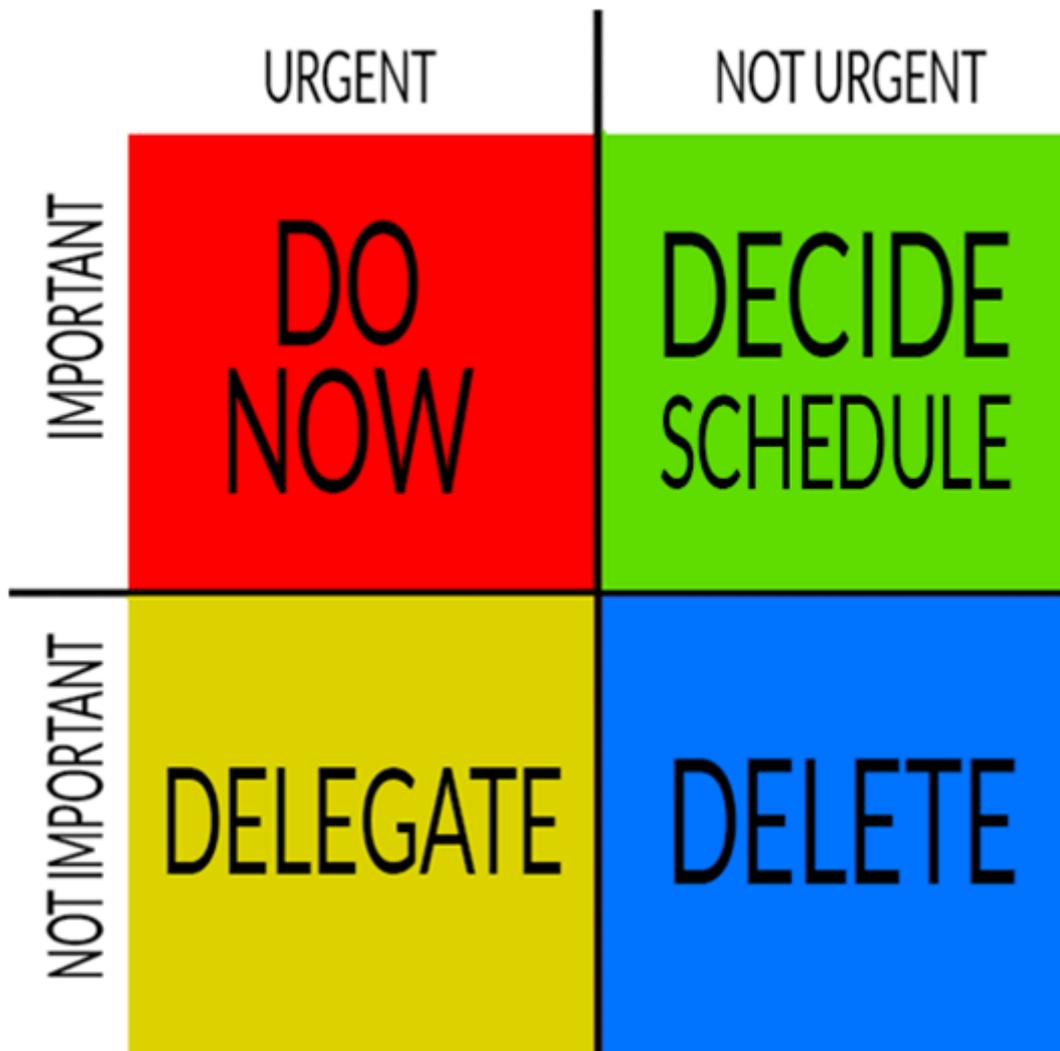


Figure 5. A visual representation of The Eisenhower Matrix. From The Eisenhower Matrix [Infographic], by Liam Frost-Camilleri, 2025. CC BY-NC 4.0

Pickle jar theory

The pickle jar theory is another prioritising tool that helps you to sort tasks into three categories: important, less important, and trivial. The important tasks in this metaphor are like big pickles being put into a jar. The less important tasks are smaller pickles that fall to fill the spaces between the big pickles. Trivial tasks are like water or sand, and they fill the crevasses between the pickles. Taking the metaphor

further, if we are to fill the pickle jar with sand (or the less important tasks), there will be no room for any pickles (important or less important tasks). Giving your tasks one of these three labels should help you to decide how much time should be spent on them.

Task Batching Technique

The Task Batching Technique involves grouping similar tasks together and completing them over a dedicated block of time. The idea behind this technique is to reduce cognitive load by only doing one type of task at a time. Despite popular opinion, multitasking, especially with technology, can be detrimental to our learning (Carrier et al., 2015). For example, instead of checking your emails several times a day for instance, you could have a dedicated time to check them once each day.

You can see by these techniques that time management is more about refining your priorities than what you do with your time. Some of these aspects might speak to you, and others might not, so it is advisable that you experiment as you try to master your time management skills.

4.5 Key strategies from this chapter

- *Develop a reader voice:* Engage in an internal dialogue when you read by asking questions, making connections, and reflecting on what you do not understand.
- *Know why you are reading:* Have a clear purpose or question in mind before you start reading to help maintain focus.
- *Ask questions:* Pose questions before and during your reading to deepen your engagement and guide your learning.
- *Use reading strategies:* Strategies such as previewing, skimming, scanning, and detailed reading can help you better navigate your readings.
- *Developing a reading habit:* Read daily to build a consistent reading habit, rewarding yourself to reinforce the practice.
- *Change the way you take notes:* Using the Cornell Note-taking method as a starting point, devise your own note taking system that is meaningful to you.
- *Use the Pomodoro technique:* Break study time into 25-minute focused intervals, followed by a 5-minute break, to improve focus and reduce procrastination.
- *Explore other productive strategies:* “Eat that frog”, the Eisenhower matrix, pickle jar theory, and task batching techniques are all strong strategies to prioritise and focus on your tasks.

4.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have:

- focussed on reading, note-taking, and time management as crucial skills for higher education success.
- discussed reading techniques that improve overall reading strategy.
- examined the structure and anatomy of a journal article to aid in effective academic reading.
- introduced how the Cornell note-taking method could be approached creatively to make notes more meaningful and fit for purpose.
- reviewed a series of time management strategies to assist with using time more effectively.

4.7 Reflection questions

- How do your current reading habits align with the strategies discussed in this chapter? Which strategies might you incorporate to improve your reading resilience?
 - Reflect on your note-taking techniques. How might the Cornell method enhance the quality of your notes?
 - Which time management strategy resonates most with your personal study routine? How can you implement it to improve your academic productivity?
 - Consider the barriers you face in your academic studies. How might adjusting your study environment or routine help you overcome these challenges?
 - How do you manage your academic tasks in relation to other responsibilities, such as work or family? What strategies from this chapter could help you better align your priorities?
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I would love to hear your thoughts on this chapter, [share your feedback](#).

CHAPTER 5: APPROACHING UNIVERSITY TASKS

Liam Frost-Camilleri

Learning Objectives

- Examine how to approach university tasks.
- Understand the importance of planning strategy.
- Follow assessment instructions carefully.
- Manage the writing process by addressing common writing issues and barriers.
- Apply academic writing conventions such as register, clarity, objectivity and correct citation practices.

Learners find completing university writing tasks a difficult process for different reasons. Some students find it challenging to start a task, having a real aversion to a blank page. Others really enjoy the reading process but struggle with writing. The key to approaching university assessment tasks is understanding your struggles and how to cater for them. It is important to normalise feeling frustrated or unsure of what you are doing when approaching these tasks. Learning is an uncomfortable journey, and you have not done this before. Additionally, many of the tasks you will complete will be open-ended, requiring you to become a little more creative in the way you approach them.

All academics will advise you to start your assessments early. While this might not be how you normally operate, there are a few things you can do to develop the practice. First, try to simply think about and discuss the assessment well before starting it. Research has shown that understanding the task by discussing it with a variety of people (including your peers, lecturers, and wider support networks) can help you better navigate it (Hawe et al., 2019). Starting this process early will help to lower anxiety and give you time to revise your work. Consider some of the barriers you might have to starting this process early and try to address them. Additionally, giving yourself an earlier deadline of a week or a day before the assessment is due will ensure that you have time to spare if things go wrong.

Like all chapters in this book, you may find some strategies helpful and others not. This chapter highlights ways to approach university tasks that are helpful practices for most students. The chapter ends with some specific points concerning writing, and the advice you will read will be more suited towards

addressing essay-style assessments. Courses and units, particularly in enabling education, will often include a wide range of different tasks such as case studies, laboratory work, field assessments, presentations, creative outputs, collaborative assessments, or even work-integrated learning. As all assessment styles are beyond the scope of this book, this chapter tries to provide general advice around planning and writing that could be used for most university assessments and tasks.

5.1 Before getting started

The first step when approaching university assessments is ensuring that you have everything you need to complete the task. This includes access to a computer, programs like Microsoft Word, a PDF reader, and the library's research database. Make sure you have all course or unit resources including readings, lecture recordings, PowerPoints, and any additional notes. These resources need to be readily accessible before you can begin any preparation work. Next, ask your lecturers for examples of previous student work. Exemplars are fantastic resources when trying to get your head around how to do the task (Hawe et al., 2019). Lastly, do not be afraid to ask clarifying questions of your lecturers or tutors, even if you think they are 'stupid questions'. You need to have a clear understanding of what is expected of you before you start planning. The research tells us that most students find it difficult to navigate academic writing conventions in their first year (Christie et al., 2014), so asking specific questions about what the writing should look like is an important step. Be aware that you might find some inconsistencies in writing expectations between courses or units (Wingate, 2006; Hassel & Ridout, 2018). Try to trust that you will eventually understand the nuances of writing expectations and that this will lead to a better understanding of academic reading, writing and critical thinking skills (Christie et al., 2014).

5.2 Visual planners

The importance of effective planning cannot be understated. Beginning assessments without sufficient planning can lead to overlooking important assessment requirements, going on irrelevant tangents, or disastrously having to start your assessment over again when you realise that it fails to answer the question or address the topic. Be aware of the type of planning that might assist you. You may simply find reviewing your notes, the readings, and the course content to be sufficient, but many students who are approaching a university assessment for the first time find visual planners to be especially helpful.

Perhaps the most common visual planner is a mind map. Mind maps are diagrams that you can use to connect concepts or ideas. It is sometimes helpful to write on the connections that you have made to help you explore your understanding. Putting the essay question or topic in the centre of your mind map and surrounding it with your thinking can help you visualise your assessment structure.



Figure 6. An example of a mind map. From Mind map example [Infographic], by Liam Frost-Camilleri, 2025. [CC BY-NC 4.0](#)

While creating a mind map is a terrific start to planning your assessment response, it is advisable for you to reflect on what you are trying to achieve in your planning. Think about the following questions before you start your visual planner:

- How can I organise the mind map?
- What are the relationships between these ideas and how can I record them?
- Do I understand every concept of the task? Do I need to go back to my notes and ask some questions?
- What question or questions am I trying to answer in this task?
- How can I rephrase the wording of the task to help my understanding?
- Do I have sources or evidence from the academic literature to support my main points or topics? If not, where are the gaps?

The *Generate-Sort-Connect-Elaborate* Thinking Routine is a very sophisticated mind-mapping tool

developed by Senior Research Associate Ron Ritchhart. It is essentially a method of organising your thoughts and understanding into a mind-mapping tool. Here is a link to the tool and a template to use <https://www.sadlier.com/school/ela-blog/how-to-use-generate-sort-connect-elaborate-concept-maps-visible-thinking-routine>. For essay planning in particular the Generate-Sort-Connect-Elaborate Thinking Routine is a great way of visualising possible essay or report elements and ideas. Additionally, it can be beneficial to slightly change some of the elements of the Routine. For instance, when you connect the different elements in your mind map, think about why you are making the connections. A little elaboration or citation on the connection can aid clarity and strengthen your argument.

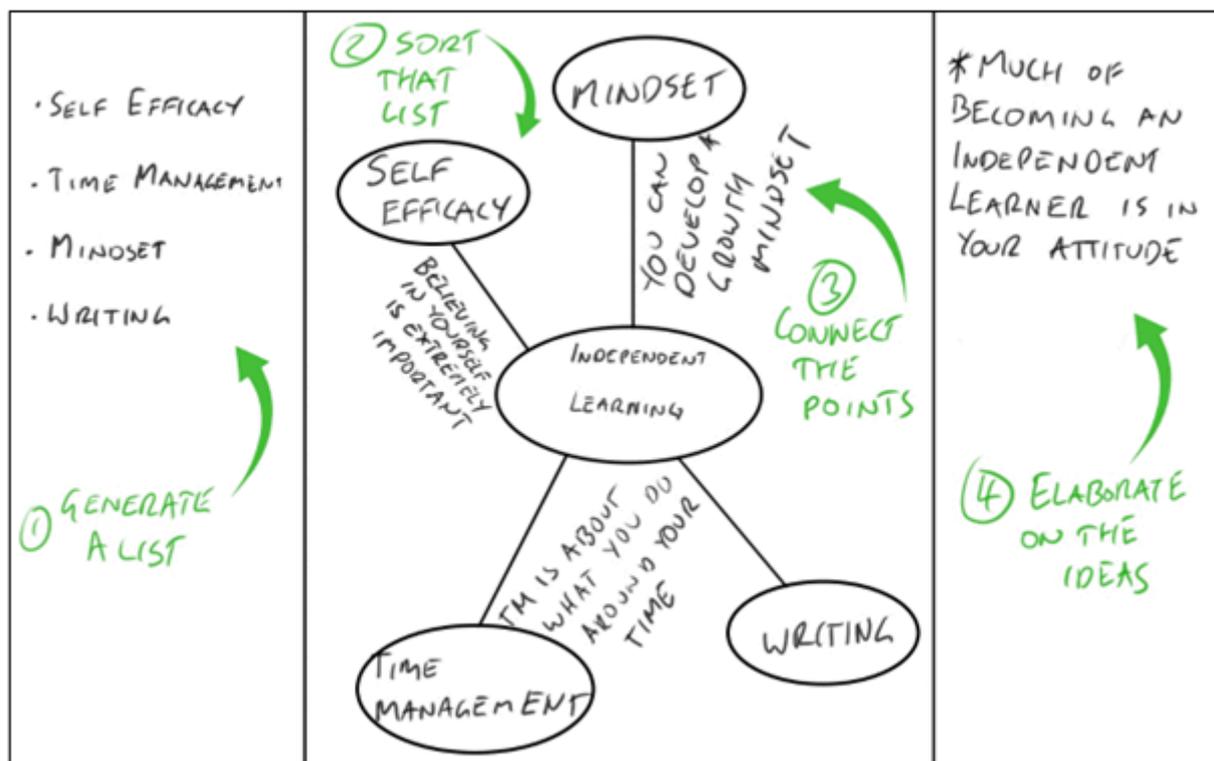


Figure 7. An example of a mind map. From A Generate-Sort-Connect-Elaborate Thinking Routine Example [Infographic], by Liam Frost-Camilleri, 2025. CC BY-NC 4.0

The key point for any visual planning tool is to experiment with how they can be used to assist you in your planning. Everything you do when planning should help shape and support your response to the assessment task.

[Learning Activity 5.1 Generate, Sort, Connect, Elaborate \[PDF\]](#)

Choose a question from the list below to create a Generate, Sort, Connect, Elaborate routine with.

- What does it mean to be an independent learner?
- How can self-efficacy be developed?
- How can we become more comfortable with productive struggle?
- How can reading strategy be developed?
- What important aspects are there when taking notes?

5.3 Following the instructions

Many university tasks stipulate precisely how you need to respond. There is a generally expected standard at most institutions: The assessment must be 1.5 or double spaced; the name of the task and unit needs to be placed in the header along with your name and student number; page numbers must appear on the footer; and there will even be a stipulation on the font and font size you must use. For this reason, it is essential that you read and reread the assessment instructions.

Most tasks have a leniency of 10% either way for their word counts. Meaning, if you were expected to write 1000 words for a task, you could write anywhere between 900 to 1100 words and not be penalised. If you go over the word count, some lecturers may refuse to mark your assessment. If you are under the word count it is likely that you have not explained your assessment in enough detail. Unlike high school, writing more words than was required is not desirable. In fact, an important skill in writing university assessments is being able to concisely communicate your points. It is also important that you do not include elements that were not asked for specifically. If the task does not ask for a title page, then do not include one. With most university assessments there is no need for word art or titles with oversized text. A bold title aligned to the left is usually more than enough.

The assessment instructions usually stipulate the program you should use for the task. This can be difficult for Mac users as most assessments are expected to be handed in as Word documents. If you are going to convert your files (perhaps from Pages to Word), make sure they will open. It is your responsibility to retain copies of your work if the lecturer cannot mark it due to it being in the incorrect format.

5.4 Academic writing is messy

Academic writing is a messy process; a piece that you thought was clear one day can seem convoluted the next. Remember that writing is a craft and strong writers write often. Here are a few ways that you can hone your writing skills.

Dealing with writer's block

It is common to feel writer's block when you are starting an assessment, but there are a few ways to get past it. Set a timer for 5 minutes and write down everything you know about the assessment topic without regard for grammar or spelling. This is called a 'stream of consciousness' and, while you will not keep most of what is written, you will find a few sentences to help you start your assessment. Another way to address writer's block is to talk about your thinking with someone to help you organise your ideas. It is sometimes helpful to talk to someone who is not completing the course or unit you are, as it forces you to focus on clarity. Drawing diagrams or mind maps using the notes or course/unit materials concerning the assessment topic, or developing a question bank, are also useful tools when you are stuck. Experimenting with different ways to get yourself started on the task will make it easier for you to focus in the long run.

Analysing the question

When you receive a question to respond to in essay or report format, ask the following questions to help you focus your assessment response:

- What is the main topic or theme of the question?
- What do the words in this question mean?
- How many sections will be needed to respond to this appropriately?
- What will these sections look like? What will they include?
- Is the question open-ended or specific and how will this impact your assessment response?
- What gaps do you have in your knowledge when answering this question and how can you address them?
- What evidence will you need to support your assessment?
- What position (for, against, or neutral) will you take on this assessment and why?
- What structure would be best used to respond to this question?

These questions are designed to help you organise how you are going to respond to the essay assessment question. You may wish to add to this list based on the feedback you receive on your assessments.

Finding the keywords

When analysing your task, highlight the keywords of the question. An assessment that asks you to 'explain' is different to a question that asks you to 'consider' for instance. Key terms also align closely with the content of the course or unit. Make notes on the keywords, highlighting your knowledge and understanding. It would be useful to divide your keywords into: Instruction words (words that tell you what to do), Content words (words that tell you what the topic is), and Limiting words (words that define the scope of the question – the where, when, and how).



Figure 8. An annotated example of finding keywords in an assessment question. From *Essay Question and Keywords*, [Infographic], by Liam Frost-Camilleri, 2025. CC BY-NC 4.0

Organise your materials

When researching for your assessment task, make sure you take accurate notes, including where you sourced your ideas from. Take care in making notes that are easily followed and understood. You do not want to be searching through a mass of papers when it comes time to apply the finishing touches to your assessment.

Structure

University assessments, such as essays, typically follow a standardised structure: introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion, and list of references. The purpose of the introduction is to provide background information on the topic and outline the overall thesis statement. The introduction should be brief but not lacking in detail. The body paragraphs are written to support the overall thesis statement or argument(s) of the essay. Body paragraphs offer evidence or examples, an analysis of each argument, and contain transitions between and within paragraphs to help with writing flow. How many body paragraphs you include can be dependent on the type of task you are completing, but do not be afraid of including several to help you analyse the intricate details of each argument. The conclusive paragraph, or conclusion, similar to the introduction, should be to the point but not lacking in detail. Conclusive paragraphs summarise the main arguments in the context of the body paragraphs. A list of references is always included at the end of the assessment. This reference list includes everything that you referenced in your assessment. If you are asked to include a bibliography, then you are to include all sources that you read, but did not necessarily cite directly.

Being open to redrafting

Redrafting your assessments is an important part of increasing your clarity. Being open to revising your work becomes more essential as you progress in your courses or units and the expectations are higher. There is no need to completely rewrite an assessment if it is effective, but looking for common mistakes in your clarity and expression and listening to the feedback you have received will help you to develop your writing skills.

Walking away and giving it time

If it is possible, try to factor in time away from the task as this will help you to gain perspective on your writing as well as your understanding. Many academics call this being ‘too close to the task’, making it easy to gloss over potential issues in your work. Being your own editor means that you will become familiar with the mistakes you commonly make. Getting some distance from the task can help you to see these mistakes with clarity.

Reading aloud

Reading your assessment out aloud can help you better ‘listen’ to how your writing sounds. If you feel awkward reading out loud, you can use the ‘read aloud’ function of your program to listen to your writing and see how it can be improved. You can also read your assessment to a spouse, peer, friend, sibling, or other family members as they can provide you feedback on sections that did not make sense or need further editing.

While writing is a messy process, there are several practical tools to help refine your assessments. As you progress on your learning journey you will find that gathering everything you need to analyse the assessment question or topic will become easier and mostly second nature with practise. Once this happens, you can focus on developing your writing clarity even further.

5.5 Features of academic writing

There are a few important features of academic writing that are worth considering. It can be useful to remember that the purpose of academic writing is to clearly communicate complex ideas. It is therefore necessary to use formal language. Formal language does not use clichés or slang terms to communicate because they can be ambiguous and difficult to decipher. It is also important not to confuse formal writing with overly wordy and flowery writing. When it comes to academic writing, simplicity is key. Additionally, formal language is never emotional, unless it is asked of you in a reflective piece of writing. Emotional appeals are not needed in academic writing because the findings are based on researched evidence, not emotional reactions.¹

Academic writing draws on well-researched source material to support the overall argument while remaining closely aligned with the assessment criteria. Strong assessments critically analyse the assessment

1. Even if the study is on emotional reactions, the writing itself will not be emotional.

question or topic and offer specific insights into the course or unit. Understanding the course/unit content well helps. Additionally, strong academic writing shows attention to detail: grammar and syntax use are correct and the assessment is cohesive and easily followed.

Reading academic assessments can help you develop a sense of what academic writing should look like in your chosen field of study. Spend some time reading previous responses to assessment tasks and see how you might be able to refine your approach.

Learning Activity 5.2 Becoming an editor [PDF]

Below is a poorly written paragraph that is missing formal language. Try to edit the piece for additional clarity and analysis. When you are done, compare it to the rewritten paragraph below and reflect on the different language used.

Poorly written paragraph:

Independent learning is really important when you start studying at university. It's a time when you need to figure out how to study by yourself without relying too much on your teachers. Self-efficacy is something you should develop because it makes you confident that you can handle your studies. Also, you should understand who you are as a learner because it will help you know what works best for you when studying. If you know how you learn, it will make things easier and help you do better in your courses.

Revised paragraph:

Striving to develop independent learning skills is essential when beginning university study. Transitioning to higher education requires autonomous study, with less reliance on your lecturers. It is important for students to cultivate their self-efficacy, as it fosters the confidence necessary to manage academic responsibilities. Additionally, reflecting and gaining a deep understanding of learner identity is vital for student growth, as it can help identify and apply effective and bespoke study strategies. A comprehensive understanding of a learner identity can lead to improved academic performance and growth.

5.6 Common mistakes in academic writing

Researchers have known how complex academic writing is for a very long time. Good writing is more than just learning rules, it requires the integration of evidence within the topic through explanations, modelling, and addressing feedback (Wingate, 2006). To that end, it is important that this section is considered

holistically, and should not be treated as a definitive list. Strong writing involves a knowledge of what to include as well as what to avoid. These are some common minor mistakes students make when they write assessments for the first time.

Discussing an article

You need only include relevant information of the articles you have read. Articles are used to simply attribute ideas to the author. You can see Chapter 7 for more advice on citations, but including elements like the article title, or where the article was published, is not normally needed in the body of the assessment.

Failing to support ideas/arguments

Unless you have attributed an idea or argument to an article, textbook, or thinker of your chosen discipline, it will be seen as unsupported and somewhat irrelevant. Evidence should be gathered first and then used to create the arguments in your assessment, not the other way around. Let the evidence tell you how you should argue your points. This is where your note-taking is especially important as you will be able to support your arguments well if your notes are organised.

Missing the question or topic

Make sure your assessment answers the entire question or addresses the topic. For a question like “Explain why becoming an independent learner is important to be successful at university level study”, forgetting to discuss ‘success’ would lead to an unfinished assessment that fails to respond to the question. Similarly, writing about high school experiences when responding to this question misses the point of what the question is asking.

Incorrect citations

Citations are covered in Chapter 7, but incorrectly attributing ideas or failing to attribute them at all are common mistakes in academic assessments that can impact your performance.

Problems with ‘I’

‘I’ should only be used for particular assessments such as reflections. At no time should a regular essay assessment contain ‘I’, as your opinion is not what is asked for; your understanding is. This point also applies to other personal pronouns, such as ‘you’, ‘we’, and ‘us’, which are also best not used in these assessments.

Incorrect language

Formal language is discussed above, but this is a common issue in first year writers. Practice your formal language often to increase your skill.

Leaving points as self-explanatory

Try not to assume that the points you make are self-explanatory. While over-explaining might make your assessment difficult to follow, it is important that you explain your points fully so your assessor can see your understanding. Striking a balance between explaining your point and not waffling on is the key here.

Introduction issues

Some students write introductions that are too long or do not include all arguments that will be presented in body paragraphs. Make sure your introductions clearly state all arguments and are as concise as possible.

Not quoting the readings from the course or unit

As your lecturers are generally experts in the discipline, they include readings that are vitally important to understanding the concepts of the course or unit. Not including references to these readings makes it very difficult to show a deep understanding of the courses or units' key points.

Using obscure or out of date references

Part of researching means finding sources that are strong, relevant, and current. If you find a source that discusses your idea but is set in another country, it might not speak to the experiences you are analysing and is therefore not worth using. Similarly, most academics only accept references published within the last 5 or 10 years. Unless what you are referencing is the original text of a great thinker in your discipline area, focus on finding current articles that are relevant to your assessment topic.

Again, this is not an exhaustive list when responding to university assessments, and it is best not to consider these points in isolation. Practice your writing and listen to any and all feedback you receive. Learning to write well is a continuous skill that takes time to refine.

5.7 Key strategies from this chapter

- *Start assessments early.* Begin thinking about the task before you start writing. Discuss the task with peers, lecturers, and support networks to clarify your understanding.
- *Gather resources.* Ensure you have all necessary materials like readings, notes, and access to databases before beginning. Request past student work for guidance.
- *Use visual tools.* The Generate-Sort-Connect-Elaborate routine, or a simple mind-map tool, can help you to structure your thoughts and identify gaps in your understanding.
- *Read assessment instructions carefully.* Pay attention to all requirements (spacing, font, formatting, word count etc.) and be concise in your response.
- *Overcome writer's block.* Streams-of-consciousness, talking through your ideas, or using diagrams and mind maps are all effective ways to address writer's block.
- *Analyse the question.* Identify keywords and break down the question to gain clarity on assessment expectations.
- *Support all arguments.* Make sure all your arguments are supported with credible sources.
- *Realise that writing is messy.* Be prepared to redraft and revise your work. Strong academic writing requires reflection, practice, and willingness to improve.
- *Understand academic writing.* Use formal language and focus on clarity of writing in your assessments.

5.8 Chapter summary

In this chapter we have:

- recognised the elements needed for writing success.
- examined how planning and preparation can positively impact your academic assessments.
- examined how tools such as mind maps can be used to explore thinking and clarify meaning.
- highlighted the importance of following instructions meticulously, including formatting, and submission guidelines.
- explored the skill of writing including using evidence to support an academic argument or points.
- considered common mistakes made by first-year students.

5.9 Reflection questions

- What personal challenges have you faced when starting university tasks, and how can you better understand these challenges to improve your approach?
- How can starting your assessment early impact your overall performance? What strategies might you use to ensure you begin your tasks promptly?
- How can visual planning tools like mind maps and the Generate-Sort-Connect-Elaborate Thinking Routine assist in organising your thoughts and planning your assessments?
- Reflect on a time when you missed an important instruction in an assessment. How did it affect your work, and what will you do differently in the future?
- Share a technique you have used or could use to overcome writer's block. How does this technique help you in the writing process?
- How do the features of formal academic writing differ from informal writing? How can you ensure your writing adheres to academic conventions?
- What common mistakes do you often encounter in your writing? How can recognising and addressing these mistakes improve your writing quality?

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I would love to hear your thoughts on this chapter, [share your feedback](#).

CHAPTER 6: NAVIGATING FEEDBACK

Liam Frost-Camilleri

Learning Objectives

- Recognise the purpose of university-level feedback.
- Identify emotional responses to feedback and implement strategies to regulate those emotions.
- Apply techniques to effectively understand and act on feedback to improve academic performance.
- Distinguish between poor and effective feedback.
- Develop constructive feedback for peers, demonstrating clarity, balance, and actionable suggestions.

Perhaps the steepest learning curve when you are starting university is navigating the feedback you receive from lecturers and tutors. You may have started your classes well, your attendance might be high, you may have read the readings and articles, begun to forge friendships, and started to understand your subject areas and their backgrounds. However, the feedback you receive may be difficult for you to read and accept. This is because university feedback is targeted at your performance and trying to push you beyond your current skill levels. Generally, university feedback on assessments may point out a couple of things you have done well, but will spend much of the time highlighting areas in need of improvement. This focus on improvement is why many students struggle when they first read their feedback.

6.1 Dealing with emotions when receiving feedback

Feedback is an area that is quite well-researched in secondary and primary schools, but not as much at university level. Most researchers tend to focus on the different perspectives of students and lecturers (Henderson et al., 2019). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that feedback significantly impacts a student's ability to develop and grow (Ahea et al., 2016). There are some terrific initiatives concerning feedback, with researchers like Carless and Boud (2018) endorsing positive feedback methods that develop feedback literacy and provide opportunities for lecturers to create a clear and open dialogue with their students about their growth.

Aside from discussing ‘readiness to receive feedback’, there is little research on the emotional toll feedback takes on students. This chapter discusses practical ways to deal with feedback and highlights the importance of emotional regulation as you navigate this rollercoaster. However, it could be worth reviewing Chapter 9 if you are feeling anxious and overwhelmed by this content.

When reading and trying to understand your feedback remember that it is not about you as a person. It is 100% about your work and only your work. While it would be nice for lecturers to spend time praising the effort you have put in, most will focus on enhancing your understanding or clarifying aspects of the content. In reality, institutes are divided as to whether praise should play much of a role in giving feedback (Morris et al., 2021). This is because most lecturers offer feedback to simply clarify understanding, not to praise or even point out what was done well. Lecturers who conduct research experience rejection of their articles and presentation ideas, which can be demoralising, but speaks to the culture of feedback and growth that is prevalent in academia.

When receiving feedback for the first time there is one important rule to follow: Do not email or message your lecturers for at least 24 hours after receiving your feedback. Giving yourself 24 hours allows you to emotionally regulate and better understand your feedback. You could feel a simple line or question written by a lecturer quite deeply, and this can be difficult to process, so giving yourself time is crucial. Once you feel calm, you can either accept the feedback or question it if it does not make sense to you.

Lecturers do not give feedback to belittle, they give feedback to help you grow as a learner. However, that does not mean you have to like it. It is important not to ‘stonewall’ your feedback and pretend it does not bother you. If you put effort into an assessment and did not achieve the score you felt you deserved, you have every right to feel angry, disappointed, disillusioned, anxious, sad, or any other combination of emotions. The important thing is to give yourself enough time to feel and process the emotion. To help process your emotions, consider the following strategies:

Seek understanding. Think about what is causing you to have an emotional reaction to the feedback. Is it the effort that you put in? Is it the idea that you might not be good enough for university?¹ Are you worried about letting someone down (including yourself)? Are you angry that you did not understand the topic as well as you thought? Or are you simply afraid of failure? These are a few possibilities, but understanding why you feel the way you do helps you to process it.

Be careful of self-criticism and rumination. There is no situation where beating yourself up will help. Your lecturer does not ‘hate you’ and your feedback is not because you are ‘stupid’, you just missed the mark this time. Negative self-talk will not help process your emotions; it will simply make you feel worse. It might be worth reviewing Chapter 2 on the concept of a growth mindset and the section on self-efficacy if you are struggling with feeling good about your feedback.

Emotional regulation. Regulating your emotions is different for everyone. Some people listen to music, others need to talk about how they feel with someone they trust. Energetic people prefer to run or swim while others watch a movie or make a comforting meal. Mindfulness is commonly used to calm down, but

1. Just a side note: this is never the case. Every university has a screening process to ensure they do not enrol you in a course that is unsuitable for you.

if this is not your thing, consider what makes you feel centred or calm. What activities help you ‘reset’?² Experiment and keep a record of what helps, so you can implement these strategies when things become emotionally difficult.

Reflect on your assessment. Once you have started to emotionally regulate, reflect on your assessment, and think about why you received the grade you did. What did you miss in the criteria and what is the feedback from the lecturer? What parts do you not understand and where can you grow and develop? Plan how you might address these points in future assessments.

Seek support. Consider who you can speak to. You might discuss your feedback with your peers to hear their insights, especially since they are enrolled in the same course or units and would have received feedback at the same time. Additionally, you can speak to learning advisers at the university, counsellors, or your family, friends, or even your cat or dog. While your pet might not respond, sometimes saying how you feel out loud will help you to process the situation. The important aspect of seeking support is finding someone you trust.

Positive reframing. Reframing the experience as positive can be empowering. Understanding the feedback gives you a chance to develop your skills further and is a terrific way to progress at university. Positive reframing can also help prevent withdrawing behaviours such as avoiding classes or disengaging from the content. It is a difficult step and is explained in detail in Chapter 2 concerning developing a growth mindset, but it helps you to navigate your feedback during your university journey.

That said, poor feedback does exist, and it is important to know the difference. If you feel your grade is unjustified, or the feedback is insufficient, the next step is to be clear about the kind of feedback you feel you deserved or what would have been more helpful. Simply telling your lecturer that their feedback “does not make sense” generally elicits the response “What don’t you understand?”, which is perhaps a fair point. If you cannot answer this question, the conversation may simply end. The first step in determining if your feedback is good or poor is understanding the criteria.

Learning Activity 6.1 Emotional reflection [PDF]

Using a piece of feedback that you have received in the past (you may choose something from secondary school if it was particularly upsetting), write a reflection about how you feel. Do not worry about correct punctuation or making the piece easily read. The point of this exercise is to

2. When I ask students how they regulate emotions, and they are unsure, they often reply with “sleep”. While sleep is restful, it does not help us to regulate or process emotions. More exploration is needed if this is your response. Mindfulness, meditation, physical activity, journaling or breathing exercises are all far more beneficial when trying to regulate emotions.

help you explore how you feel. Give yourself a few minutes then read over your work to answer the following questions.

- What can you learn about who you are from this reflection?
- What does this reflection tell you about what triggers you when receiving feedback?
- Does this reflection offer any clues to strategies that might help you process your emotions?

6.2 Understanding criteria

It is crucial to understand how important criteria are when being assessed at university. Criteria are used to grade your assessments, provide feedback on how you can improve and will always be provided with the assessment details. They are almost always written to reflect the most important learnings of the course or unit, which means the more you understand the content, the better you will generally perform in assessments. More importantly, the criteria guides your assessor when grading your work. So, if your piece is beautifully written but fails to answer the assessment question, you should prepare yourself for a lower mark.

Sometimes, you will receive a set of marking criteria without a high, medium, or low rating or accompanying letter grade. This can depend on the marking tools prevalent in your chosen discipline. The following is an example of a common way to present criteria, called a rubric. Rubrics are tools for communicating, discussing, and marking assessments. Typically, rubrics have high, medium, and low columns, but they can come in a variety of formats. In any case, it is always worth discussing the criteria with your lecturer if you are unsure of anything. The following is a fairly generic rubric commonly used for assessments.

Figure 9. An example of typical criteria for a university assessment. From Typical University Assessment Criteria, [Infographic], by Liam Frost-Camilleri, 2025. [CC BY-NC 4.0](#)

	High (Distinction/High Distinction)	Medium (Credit/Pass)	Low (Fail)
Understanding of Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates an in-depth and sophisticated understanding of the key concepts. • Shows strong analytical skills by thoroughly explaining, critiquing, and connecting the concepts to broader themes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides some analysis and explanation, but may lack depth or nuance in some areas. • Makes connections to broader themes, but these may be superficial or not fully developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates a limited or superficial understanding of the key concepts. • Analysis is minimal or missing, with explanations that are vague, incorrect, or overly simplistic.
Use of Course Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates a strong ability to synthesise course content with external sources, where appropriate. • Uses evidence from the course content critically and appropriately to strengthen the essay's arguments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrates some course materials but may rely heavily on a limited range of sources. • Shows an attempt to synthesise course content with external sources, but this is not always effective or relevant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fails to adequately use course material to support arguments, or misuses course content. • Lacks synthesis of course content with other sources, or the integration is relevant or incorrect.
Argument and Critical Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presents a clear, coherent, and persuasive argument throughout the essay. • Demonstrates a high level of critical thinking, with arguments that are logical, well structured, and thoroughly analysed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presents an argument that is generally clear but may lack coherence or depth in some areas. • Show some critical thinking skills but may rely on descriptive rather than analytical content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presents an argument that is unclear, unfocused, or poorly developed. • Lacks critical thinking with arguments that are mainly descriptive or unsupported by evidence.
Organisation and Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essay is logically structured with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. • Each paragraph has a clear topic sentence and develops a single idea, linking effectively to the overall argument. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essay has a recognisable structure, but some sections may be disorganised or lack clear focus. • Most paragraphs have a topic sentence, but some may likely focus or connection to the main argument. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essay lacks a clear structure, making it difficult to follow the argument. • Paragraphs lack a topic sentence and are poorly organised, often jumping between ideas without clear connections.
Conclusion and Synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a thoughtful synthesis that connects the essay's points to broader implications or future research. Reinforces the essay's main argument in a compelling and persuasive manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a basic synthesis of the essay's points but may not fully connect them to the broader implications. Restates the essay's main argument without adding significant insight or persuasive strength. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks synthesis, failing to connect the essay's points to broader implications or context. Does not reinforce the essay's main argument, or does so in a vague or unconvincing manner.

Have a read of these criteria and think about what the assessment is trying to get you to focus on. You may even wish to make a few notes on what you can see in each of the criteria, as follows:

OFTEN THE LEVELS ARE CONNECTED TO THE LETTER GRADE

FIND THE WORDS THAT MAKE EACH LEVEL DIFFERENT

	High (Distinction/High Distinction)	Medium (Credit/Pass)	Low (Fail)
Understanding of Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates an in-depth and sophisticated understanding of the key concepts. Shows strong analytical skills by thoroughly explaining, critiquing, and connecting the concepts to broader themes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a general understanding of the key concepts. Provides some analysis and explanation, but may lack depth or nuance in some areas. Makes connections to broader themes, but these may be superficial or not fully developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a limited or superficial understanding of the key concepts. Analysis is minimal or missing, with explanations that are vague, incorrect, or overly simplistic.
Use of Course Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a strong ability to synthesise course content with external sources, where appropriate. Uses evidence from the course content critically and appropriately to strengthen the essay's arguments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrates some course materials but may rely heavily on a limited range of sources. Shows an attempt to synthesise course content with external sources, but this is not always effective or relevant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fails to adequately use course materials to support arguments, or misuses course content. Lacks synthesis of course content with other sources, or the integration is irrelevant or incorrect.
Argument and Critical Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents a clear, coherent, and persuasive argument throughout the essay. Demonstrates a high level of critical thinking, with arguments that are logical, well-structured, and thoroughly analysed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents an argument that is generally clear but may lack coherence or depth in some areas. Shows some critical thinking skills but may rely on descriptive rather than analytical content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents an argument that is unclear, unfocused, or poorly developed. Lacks critical thinking, with arguments that are mainly descriptive or unsupported by evidence.
Organisation and Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essay is logically structured with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. Each paragraph has a clear topic sentence and develops a single idea, linking effectively to the overall argument. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essay has a recognisable structure, but some sections may be disorganised or lack clear focus. Most paragraphs have a topic sentence, but some may lack clear focus or connection to the main argument. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essay lacks a clear structure, making it difficult to follow the argument. Paragraphs lack topic sentences and are poorly organised, often jumping between ideas without clear connections.
Conclusion and Synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a thoughtful synthesis that connects the essay's points to broader implications or future research. Reinforces the essay's main argument in a compelling and persuasive manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a basic synthesis of the essay's points but may not fully connect them to broader implications. Restates the essay's main argument but without adding significant insight or persuasive strength. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lacks synthesis, failing to connect the essay's points to broader implications or context. Does not reinforce the essay's main argument, or does so in a vague or unconvincing manner.

TRY TO HIGHLIGHT ANYTHING YOU ARE UNSURE OF

MOST ESSAYS WHILE NOT ARGUMENTS STILL HAVE ARGUMENTS IN THEM

MAKE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND EACH CRITERIA

ASK YOUR LECTURERS ABOUT WORDS YOU ARE UNSURE OF.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO FOLLOW THE STRUCTURE YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN

Figure 10. Typical University Assessment Criteria – Annotated, [Infographic], by Liam Frost-Camilleri, 2025. [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

The focus of this rubric is reasonably straightforward. There is an emphasis on presenting an argument, an understanding of the course or unit and the concepts discussed in class, and an ability to critically think and synthesise your ideas. While correct grammar and accuracy in your writing are important for fulfilling the criteria, they are not criteria that you are graded on here. This is a common misconception for students; you may write a fantastic essay that discusses the course or unit content but fail to use an argumentative structure, impacting your ability to score highly on the criteria ‘Argument and Critical Thinking’ and

‘Organisation and Structure’. While answering the question is crucial, it is also extremely important to be aware of what else you need to consider when constructing your assessment.

If you have considered the criteria and still believe your assessment addresses it quite well, then it is time to consider what makes the feedback poor, and what you might be able to do about it.

Learning Activity 6.2 Analysing criteria [PDF]

Choose an assessment that you have to complete and find the assessment’s criteria. Annotate these criteria and create a series of questions related to what you do not understand well.

- What do you notice about the criteria?
- What are the criteria trying to assess?
- What do you need to know more about to respond to the criteria appropriately?

6.3 Recognising and addressing poor feedback

Good feedback will usually start with something you have done well or that you have made a solid start. Then the marker will identify key things you need to do to improve your work so you know exactly what you need to do next. The feedback will be explicitly linked to the marking criteria or rubric. Poor feedback tends to focus on things that are not present in the criteria. All feedback should be tied to the course or unit content and the skills required for the assessment task. If you receive feedback contrary to this, then it is best to discuss it with your lecturer or assessor. However, it is important to note that while ‘inclusion of citations’ is not written on many rubrics, it is a general expectation that needs to be followed. The same could be said for using emotionally neutral language.

Importantly, in some instances, your assessor might not be your class lecturer. This is quite common for universities. In fact, many institutes opt to have different lecturers mark your work to avoid potential biases.

It is best to have a conversation about your assessment outside of classes. Feel free to talk to your lecturer during class, but try to lead with, “I wonder if we can have a conversation about my feedback on my last assessment?”. You can then find a mutual time to meet and discuss it.

When you meet with your lecturer, try to explain which parts of the criteria you felt your assessment fulfilled well (it may be helpful to bring a copy of your work and highlight relevant sections). This conversation is not about your disappointment, how hard you worked on your assessment, or the grades that other people in the class received. It is about the quality of the work that you submitted and whether it meets the criteria.

Most lecturers are happy to discuss their feedback and some also enjoy the challenge of improving how

they mark. You may inadvertently help them become better at their job. If after this conversation you still feel uncertain about your feedback and wish to take it further, you can speak to a course coordinator or email the Dean (or equivalent) directly. The Dean or course coordinator may ask for the assessment to be marked by another academic to see if they agree.³ A conversation then follows. This is quite a lengthy process, and it is always advisable to try to resolve the situation with the lecturer first, but it is important to know what your options are.

6.4 Providing feedback

As a student at university, you may be asked to provide feedback to your peers. Since most courses or units are connected to occupations, your ability to understand what ‘good practice’ looks like is an important skill that universities are responsible for developing.

When giving feedback, aim to be as clear as possible. Try not to confuse clarity with a lack of complexity. Your feedback can be complex, but it needs to be concise and to the point. You are aiming for your feedback to be easily understood.

Another important element of giving feedback is to be balanced. This does not mean you need to give a compliment sandwich⁴ or something similar, it just means you should aim to give feedback that is measured and not exaggerated or emotional. Some students like to use metaphors in their feedback, but this not only impacts clarity, it can provoke an unwanted emotional response. Telling a peer that their voice in their presentation sounded like a “squeaking toy” may be taken quite harshly.

Lastly, ensure that the feedback you give is constructive. Constructive feedback offers an alternative or suggests something for the student to focus on. For instance, you might tell a peer that the speed of their presentation was too fast and that it might help the audience understand the topic better if they slowed down. You may also tell a peer that their reflection focused on what they did rather than on what they might do next. Useful and actionable constructive feedback is the aim here.

As you can see, feedback can be quite an emotional process. It is important to discuss your feedback and allow yourself to feel emotional about it while finding time to process how you feel.

6.5 Key strategies from this chapter

3. Most universities will automatically cross-mark fail grades. Cross-marking is when a second assessor reviews a failed response to determine if they agree with the original grade. Some universities even cross-mark their High Distinction grades for a similar reason.

4. A compliment sandwich is feedback that has three parts. Something positive, some constructive criticism and then something else positive. The positive comments are the ‘bread’ and the constructive criticism is the ‘sandwich filling’.

- *Regulate your emotions:* Giving yourself time to understand your emotions is an effective way to help regulate when receiving feedback.
- *Reframe your feedback:* Understand that feedback is an opportunity for growth and is about your work, not about you as a person.
- *Seek to understand the criteria:* Ensure that you have thoroughly read the criteria of your assessments to ensure your work meets the lecturer's expectations.
- *Identify poor feedback:* Good feedback is linked to assessment criteria and focuses on improvement. If feedback is vague or not connected to the criteria, seek clarification.
- *Provide effective feedback to your peers:* Be clear, concise, constructive, and balanced in your feedback to your peers to practice giving effective feedback to others.

6.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have:

- discussed how university feedback is primarily constructive and focuses on areas for improvement rather than only on praise, differing significantly from feedback at earlier educational levels.
- discussed emotional regulation and its role when receiving feedback.
- understood that assessment criteria are crucial when interpreting feedback.
- understood that poor feedback may exist, but recognising it requires a solid understanding of the criteria.
- examined how providing feedback to peers is an important skill at university, and it should be clear, balanced, and constructive to help others grow in their learning, and recognise good practice in your chosen discipline area.

6.7 Reflection questions

- How do you usually react emotionally when receiving feedback? What strategies could you use to regulate these emotions more effectively?
- Think of a recent piece of feedback you received. How did it align with the criteria for the assessment? Were there any discrepancies between your understanding of the task and the feedback?
- What is common in your feedback from your teachers? Are they all saying the same thing? How might you gain more clarity on this piece of feedback?
- Why is it important to separate personal feelings from the content of feedback? How can this improve your academic growth?
- In what ways can you improve the clarity of the feedback you provide to your peers?
- How can understanding the course or unit criteria in detail help you improve your future assignments?

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I would love to hear your thoughts on this chapter, [share your feedback](#).

CHAPTER 7: RESEARCHING, PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Liam Frost-Camilleri

Learning Objectives

- Identify and apply effective search strategies when researching.
- Differentiate between task words, content words, and limiting words in an assessment question.
- Construct and refine search strings using Boolean operators.
- Understand the principles and importance of referencing in academic work.
- Define academic integrity and recognise its importance in the university setting.
- Identify different forms of plagiarism, including self-plagiarism and collusion.
- Demonstrate how to avoid plagiarism through effective notetaking and paraphrasing.
- Explore how GenAI tools are used in academia.

This chapter is intended to help you conduct research by discussing ways of searching, citing sources, and addressing issues such as plagiarism. Universities are extremely focused on maintaining researcher integrity, so there are rules that must be followed when completing your assessments.

7.1. How to search

Working effectively with information is key to successful study and research. The ethical use of information, especially scholarly information, forms the basis for writing any type of assessment and examination and constructing visual and oral presentations.

Six Steps to Searching

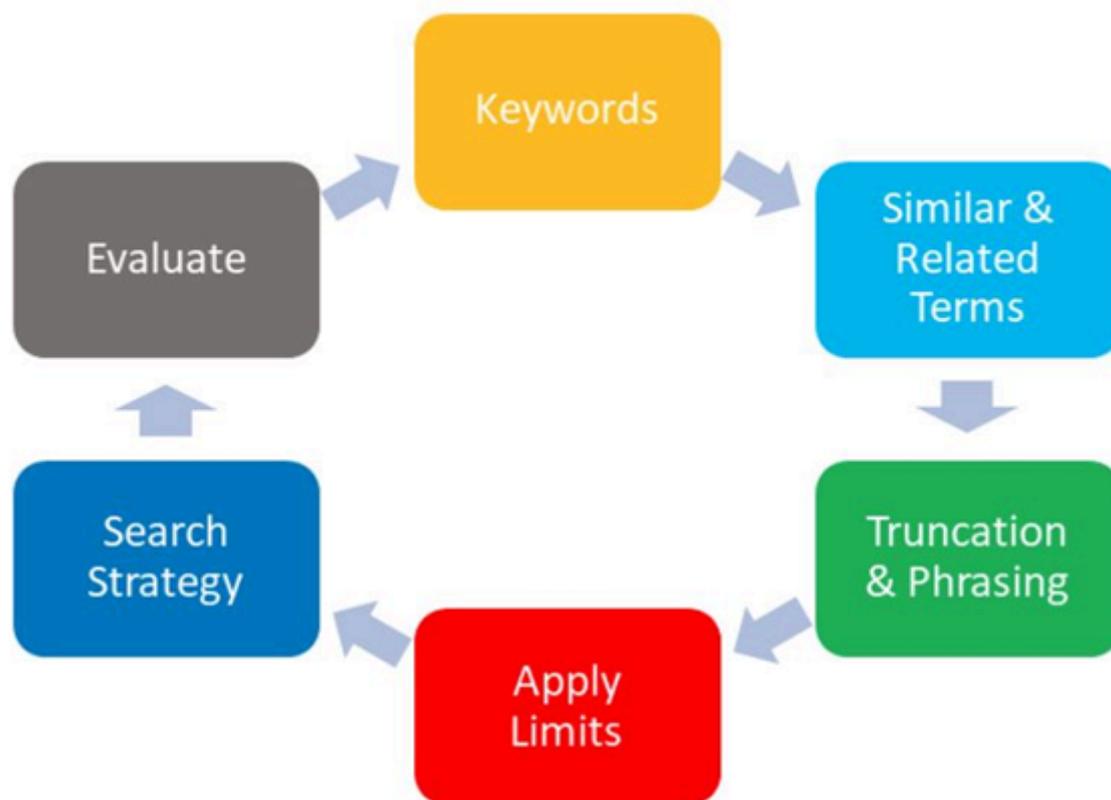


Figure 11. From Six steps to searching. [Infographic] by James Cook Library, 2023, Foundations of academic success (2nd ed.), James Cook University. <https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/academicssuccess2e/chapter/working-with-information/>. CC BY 4.0

Research is an ongoing process. Plan your search, try some different search strategies, and evaluate the results. There is no one ‘perfect search’ and you may need to revisit the *Six Steps to Searching* (Keywords, similar & related terms, truncation & phrasing, apply limits, search strategy, and evaluate) many times before finding the sources most relevant to your needs. Allow plenty of time for searching, and see a librarian if you need help. Here are some examples to get you started:

Identify the Keywords

The first step is to work out what your assessment topic is about and what you have to do. Consider the context and identify the keywords in your question. These can be:

Task words: Task words are usually verbs and they tell you what to do to complete your assessment.

Content words: Content words are the main ideas and concepts you need to research.

Limiting words: Limiting words help you focus on a particular aspect of your topic, such as a particular occupation, discipline, age, gender, or time period. It also refers to the word limit and number of references required.

Here is an example with the task words, content words, and limiting words highlighted:

Discuss some of the **ethical** considerations for researchers conducting **research** involving **humans**.

Should researchers be made to abide to **codes of conduct**? **Why/Why not**?

Task words – Discuss, Why/Why not (give reasons)

Content words – ethical, research, codes of conduct

Limiting words – humans

Brainstorming Similar and Related Terms

You can conduct a simple search using just the keywords from the assessment question, but you will get better results if you expand your list of keywords to include similar and related terms for each key concept. These could be:

- synonyms (words with a similar meaning)
- alternative spellings (e.g. American spelling)
- related terms – even antonyms (opposites) will sometimes work well

Phrase Searching

When searching for two or more words together, place these words in double quotation marks. This forces the search tool to search for them in that exact order, e.g. “human research”, “code of conduct”, “government control”.

Truncation

Truncation saves you time. Place an asterisk after part of a word to get results for this word with different endings. For example, a search for child* will give you results for child, children, childish, and childlike.

Be careful where you put the asterisk so you get the most relevant results (think about where the word changes, and how the different endings of the word are spelled).

Create a Search String

A search string combines your keywords using the Boolean operators AND and OR. Boolean operators are computer commands. Make sure you write the words AND and OR in capital letters so the search engine or database doesn't mistake them for ordinary words.

AND combines different concepts, e.g. burnout AND teacher* AND “secondary school”. AND narrows a search by making sure you only get results with all of the search terms.

OR combines similar and related terms for the same concept. Place these related terms in parentheses (round brackets), e.g. (burnout OR stress OR “mental health”). OR widens a search and gives you more results by searching for any of the search terms in the brackets.

Here is a sample search string:

(“human research” OR “research on humans”) AND ethic* AND (dementia OR Alzheimers)
 (government OR State) AND (control OR censor*) AND ethic*

[Learning Activity 7.1 Practise searching \[PDF\]](#)

Choose a topic in your course (independent learning or time management are common topic choices). It could be worth using an assessment question that you have coming up. You can then use the advice in this chapter to put it in the search bar of your university's library website. Then use the filters to narrow your results to make them more relevant. There are a number of options in the list of Filters, but you should always think about using:

- *Peer-reviewed Journals* (if you have been asked to find journal articles)
- *Books or Book Chapters* (if you need to find books – N.B. you can't use this option if you have chosen "peer-reviewed journals")
- *Date* (if you need to find works that aren't too old, unless you are referring to the origins of an idea, it is usually expected that you limit your search to the last 5 years)
- *Subject* (to find subject headings that help focus your results to the most appropriate ideas)
- *Available online* (to find articles that you can download and read now).

Now spend some time deciding which sources would be helpful and why. Focus on articles that are peer-reviewed and relevant to your context (if you are from Australia, an Australian or "western society" example is always going to be more relevant to you and your situation).

7.2. Referencing

You will need to provide a reference for every source of information you use in your assessments. This involves putting a short, in-text citation in the body of your assessment to show that your information has come from another source (and is not your original idea). You would then need to include a full reference in the reference list (or list of works cited) at the end of your assessment, so people can find the original sources. There are several reasons why you need to reference, as referencing:

- demonstrates academic integrity,
- allows you to provide evidence to support your ideas,
- shows you have read widely about the topic,
- shows that your work is based on reliable information, and
- allows others to verify the information you have provided.

There are two main types of references that should be included in your work:

- **In-text citations** should be provided in the body of your work; and
- A **reference list** with full bibliographic details of the sources you have used should be added at the end of your work.

It is important to take accurate notes of your sources so that you can attribute the right source to the information you collected. Always record relevant information when you first find a source as it can be tricky finding referencing information after you have written your assessment. For every source you want to use in an assessment, you will need to find:

- **Who wrote it?** (the author might be a person or an organisation, like Queensland Health)
- **When was it published?** (sometimes you just need the year, sometimes you need more details)
- **What is/are the title(s)?** (there can be more than one title, the title of the article or chapter as well as the title of the journal or book. Make sure you record both)
- **What are the publication details?** (for a book you will need the publisher, for a journal article you will need the volume, issue, and page numbers)
- **What is the URL or DOI?** (if it lives online, you need to provide the webpage address or the Digital Object Identifier (DOI) to help other people find it)

There are many referencing styles that include the above details, and it is important that you are clear on which style you are to use. For example, below you can see the same information cited in APA 7th style and AMA 11th style. Can you see how the same information is laid out in different ways? Look at the punctuation and where the year of publication (2018) appears.

From *APA 7th and AMA 11th Citation and Referencing Styles* [Table]. B. Carter & R. Morgan, 2023, *Foundations of academic success* (2nd ed.), James Cook University. <https://jcu.pressbooks.pub/academicsuccess2e/chapter/working-with-information/>. CC BY NC SA 4.0

	APA 7th	AMA 11th
In-text citation	Hospice patients often have a positive outlook on life (Wright et al., 2018).	Hospice patients often have a positive outlook on life. ¹
Reference list entry	Wright, S. T., Breier, J. M., Depner, R. M., Grant, P. C., & Lodi-Smith, J. (2018). Wisdom at the end of life: Hospice patients' reflections on the meaning of life and death. <i>Counselling Psychology Quarterly</i> , 31(2), 162-185. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070.2016.1274253	Wright ST, Breier JM, Depner RM, Grant PC, Lodi-Smith J. Wisdom at the end of life: hospice patients' reflections on the meaning of life and death. <i>Couns Psychol Q</i> . 2018;31(2):162-185. doi:10.1080/09515070.2016.1274253

Most university libraries have a guide specific to the needs of your course, but failing this, you can easily find guides online that can help you. As many enabling programs use APA 7th as their preferred referencing style, the examples below are formatted in APA 7th edition.

To work out how to reference a source, ask three key questions:

1. **What is it?** (Journal article? Book? A website?)
2. **How many authors does it have?** (each style has rules for what to do if you have more than two authors, or if your author is a company instead of a person)
3. **What style am I supposed to use?**

Here is an example of a direct citation (or quote):

Algorithmic logics “organize the space and flow of interaction” (Caliandro, 2018, p. 557).

For a direct citation, the quote must be in inverted commas and you must include the page number. Pay particular attention to the use of commas (after the author and year), full stops (after ‘p’ for ‘page’), and year (after the author), as these are important aspects of citing work. You also need to reference any content that you have paraphrased (put into your own words) or summarised, but you do not need to use inverted commas when you paraphrase. For example:

Social networks are complex assemblages of users, algorithms, and data (Pearce, 2018).

When you are paraphrasing you just need to include the author and the year. The author’s names and the date of the work cited may also be written as part of the sentence, for example:

Yang et al. (2013) argued that digital literacy skills allow students to take advantage of flexible and distance learning opportunities.

Notice that the name of the author is included in the assessment. Also, when there are three or more authors, APA 7th requires you to include an “et al.” after the first author, which tells the reader that there are more than two authors. If there are two authors, you need to include an “and” when the names are a part of the sentence, and an “&” when they are between brackets. For example:

Smith and Jones (2018) argue that reading is essential when attending university.

And:

Reading is essential when attending university (Smith & Jones, 2018).

The reference list at the end of the assessment would then list the full bibliographic details of the works you have cited in alphabetical order, including the names of all authors. You can find examples of a reference list at the end of each chapter in this textbook. It is also important to reference any images, media, statistics, or graphs that you use in your work.

There are software and programs to help you with your referencing, but always check what they have given you before you hand it in. Software is notoriously imperfect with referencing, and you can lose marks for not referencing correctly. It also depends on your ability to enter the information correctly into these referencing programs. It is always recommended that you first learn how to reference correctly before you use any programs to assist you.

Referencing correctly can seem like a daunting task at first, but it’s just a matter of putting the right piece of information into the right part of the pattern. University libraries provide a lot of training and support for referencing and you will have plenty of opportunities to attend training or ask for help.

[Learning Activity 7.2 Practise citation \[PDF\]](#)

The following is an excerpt from Chapter 2 of this textbook. Have a read of this section again and complete the following referencing tasks:

A fixed mindset is evident in people who tend to take criticism very harshly, give up easily and often exclaim ‘there’s just no point in trying’ or ‘see? I knew that I would fail.’ Individuals with a fixed mindset believe that intelligence is fixed and cannot be changed, or they attribute their failures to external factors. In other words, you are born with your abilities and they cannot be improved upon. This mindset can lead to behaviours that discourage taking on challenges, avoid responsibility, and inhibit personal growth.

People with a growth mindset, however, tend to handle criticism more positively. They understand that feedback on their work is not a reflection of their personal worth but an opportunity to improve their abilities. Those with a growth mindset might say things like ‘I can grow from my mistakes’ or ‘if I make a mistake, I can just keep trying’ or ‘I don’t know how to do it yet.’ They believe that intelligence and abilities can be developed through effort and perseverance. Embracing a growth mindset encourages individuals to welcome challenge, take ownership of their learning and strive for self-improvement.

Please use the APA 7th referencing style for the following activities.

1. Write a sentence where you quote a section of this text directly.
2. Write a sentence where you paraphrase a section of this text, being sure to preserve the message of the text.
3. Write a sentence where you use the author’s name as part of the sentence.
4. Write a reference as it would appear in the reference list based on this text.

7.3. Academic integrity

You will probably encounter the term “academic integrity” frequently while you are a student. Understanding and applying academic integrity is essential for success at university. An important part of academic integrity is understanding plagiarism which is covered in this section.

“Academic integrity means acting with the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility in learning, teaching and research” (Exemplary Academic Integrity Project, 2013).

Academic integrity is honest, respectful, and ethical behaviour within the university environment. Examples include using references to show where the information you are using comes from and ensuring all the work you submit is your own original content. Academic integrity is demonstrated when you

accurately attribute ideas, direct and indirect quotes, images, and other information to the correct source. Another important aspect of academic integrity is understanding plagiarism.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the accidental or deliberate use of other people's work without sufficient attribution. In effect, you are claiming someone else's work as your own. Accidental plagiarism can be avoided by using effective notetaking and referencing practices. Notetaking ensures you have the details needed to accurately report and attribute the resources you use. Additionally, taking notes in your own words with the full reference of your source will make it easier to write your assessments while avoiding accidental plagiarism. Paraphrasing, or rewriting the original ideas in your own words, is also required. Paraphrasing allows you to focus on aspects of original work that support your arguments and to synthesise from multiple sources of information.

Self-plagiarism

Self-plagiarism or recycling is the re-use of your own work in a subsequent assessment. At first glance, this may appear to be an efficient use of your time and effort. However, self-plagiarism does not demonstrate that you have learned anything new. Likewise, self-plagiarism does not show that you have achieved the expected outcomes of your course or unit. You can use the same sources of information, but to avoid self-plagiarism you will need to write a new assessment to address the new topic, question, or perspective. Self-plagiarism or recycling can also occur when you need to re-enrol into a course or unit. If you do need to re-enrol, you must submit completely new attempts at the assessments rather than simply recycling your old attempts.

Collusion

Collusion occurs when a student works with other students, friends, paid tutors, or family members, and then submits that shared work as if it is their own original work (Crook & Nixon, 2018).

Working with others and discussing the content of a course or the requirements of an assessment can be productive, helpful, and enjoyable. This type of support is called collaboration, which is different to collusion. However, the final submission for an individual piece of assessment must be your own (unless it is a group assessment). This does not mean that you cannot work with your peers, discuss subject material, study together, or help each other with proof-reading, but you must not:

- provide work for another student to submit as part of their own assessment,
- use other students' content in your own assessment,
- co-write individual assessment items, or
- provide others with answers to quizzes, essay topics, or tests.

Setting clear expectations regarding peer feedback and making sure you understand the requirements of your assessment tasks can help you avoid collusion.

Academic integrity governs all that you do at university. It is made visible by accurately attributing ideas, images, or other information you use in your work. It is also important to only submit your own original work for assessment or to clarify the contributions of others where relevant. When reading your work, your assessor should be able to identify the ideas that you used to support your thinking and be confident that

anything else is your personal contribution. Being diligent with referencing, and only submitting work that is your own, are two clear ways to act with academic integrity.

7.4 Note on Generative AI (GenAI)

Generative AI (GenAI) is an emerging technology that can be used to generate text, code, music, video, and images. It generates these using prompts and has the potential to be a powerful tool in academia for brainstorming ideas and refining writing. However, as GenAI raises several questions concerning academic integrity, many universities have begun implementing different assessment styles such as group discussions, or physical exams to curb its use by students.

It is unfortunate that this section is included in a chapter about academic integrity, as it does have the potential to cast GenAI in quite a negative light. While the use of GenAI can mean issues with academic integrity, it does have the potential to be quite a helpful tool to refine notes, thinking, and reflection. But using the technology means having to do so responsibly. And while using GenAI tools does not inherently mean you have compromised your academic integrity, being transparent about your use is very important.

As GenAIs are still an emerging technology, universities have only just begun to develop their policies and decide on their general approach. It is therefore important to be clear on what the course or unit allows in terms of GenAI use. Carefully reading course or unit descriptors and other relevant student information will give you an understanding of your university's policies concerning GenAI. If the use of GenAI is permitted, its use must be acknowledged. Conversely, if the guidelines prohibit GenAIs use, using them would constitute a violation of academic integrity, regardless of whether you disclose it.

An example of appropriate GenAI use could be seen in a teaching course or unit. You may be permitted to use GenAI to develop lesson plans or student handouts. However, the course or unit may require you to reflect on and criticise the lesson plans or student handouts created. In this instance, it would be important to acknowledge the use of GenAI for its creation of lesson plans or student handouts, but not for your reflection and critique. Here, you can see that the lecturer places more importance on the process of reflection and critique than the development of classroom tools.

It is important to understand how and when you can responsibly use GenAI while maintaining transparency and integrity. Always consult your lecturers and course or unit guidelines if you are unsure.

7.5 Key strategies from this chapter

- *Use the six steps to searching:* Follow a structured process when you search to improve the process. Identify keywords, brainstorm similar/related terms, use phrase searching,

apply truncation, create search strings with Boolean operators, and evaluate search results.

- *Use synonyms and related terms:* Expanding your search by including synonyms, alternative spellings, and related terms will improve your search results.
- *Use Boolean operators:* Use AND to combine concepts (narrow search) and OR to combine synonyms (widen search) to improve your search.
- *Use filters:* Apply filters like peer-reviewed journals, date limits, and subject filters to narrow your results and increase relevancy.
- *Accurately cite and reference:* By accurately citing sources using in-text citations and including a full reference list, your argument is strengthened while giving appropriate attribution to the ideas in your assessment.
- *Take accurate notes:* Record full source details as you read, to make developing a referenced list easier.
- *Avoid plagiarism:* Avoid accidental or intentional plagiarism by correctly referencing sources. Paraphrasing (putting ideas into your own words) and proper notetaking are key practices to ensure you avoid plagiarism.
- *Avoid self-plagiarism:* Reusing your previous work for a new assignment (without permission) is considered self-plagiarism.
- *Avoid collusion:* Collaborative work should be limited to studying and discussing ideas, not co-authoring assessments unless explicitly allowed.
- *Use GenAI responsibly:* While GenAI tools can be valuable for brainstorming and refining writing, always be transparent about their use in your work. Always check your university's policy and specific course or unit regarding GenAI use and expectations.

7.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have:

- discussed how the ethical use of information is crucial for academic success.
- examined how to identify task words, content words, and limiting words.
- introduced Boolean operators and search strings as tools for refining search results.
- discussed how referencing is key to demonstrating academic integrity, supporting ideas,

and ensuring the reliability of information.

- examined how academic integrity is foundational to university life, encompassing honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility.
- focused on how to avoid plagiarism and its importance in academic integrity.
- developed an understanding of when GenAI can and cannot be used.

7.7 Reflection questions

- How do you typically approach the research process, and what changes can you make to improve your search strategies given what you have learned in this chapter?
- Why is it important to understand the specific requirements of different referencing styles? How does this impact your academic work?
- In what ways can you ensure that you consistently maintain academic integrity in your assessments?
- How is the focus on academic integrity at university different to other schooling such as secondary school?
- How can you plan to incorporate effective notetaking and paraphrasing techniques into your study routine to avoid plagiarism?
- How can you work with others in a collaborative way to support your learning and avoid collusion?
- How can you be sure that your potential use of GenAI tools does not cause an academic integrity issue?

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CHAPTER 8: GROUP WORK

Liam Frost-Camilleri

Learning Objectives

- Identify the key roles within group work and their functions.
- Understand the importance of equity over equality in group work.
- Reflect on your experiences and emotions in group work settings.
- Understand the professional relevance of group work, both at university and in the workplace.
- Apply conflict resolution and clear communication strategies in group work.
- Examine the benefits of group work.

While there are several benefits to group work, many students struggle with the challenge. This is often due to poor secondary school experiences or the feeling they “did more work” than the other group members and therefore deserve a higher grade. While students may disagree on how group work should be executed, it serves an important function. Collaboration with peers is expected in almost all professions, and the ability to work effectively with others is a key aspect of being employable, especially in academia. It might surprise you to learn that the idea of the academic working alone in a dark room by themselves to uncover the secrets of the universe is inaccurate. Academics rely on one another to make sense of their research and to progress in their fields. Group work is common, as seen in the articles and book chapters with multiple authors. While not always successful or enjoyable, group work is an important aspect of academic life.

Supporting the idea of collaboration, research has found that group work has a variety of benefits including aiding student retention. Sharing student learning, expressing emotions, negotiating, paralleling the professional world, and providing opportunities for peer assessment and individualised assessment tools are group work benefits supported by research (Beccaria et al., 2014; Clarke & Blissenden, 2013; Shaw et al., 2015).

Given group work can be divisive, it may be better to approach it with the goal of making the most of the situation rather than aiming for perfection. As with many new experiences during your first year of university, re-learning and reframing your attitudes towards group work comes with emotional challenges that need to be addressed.

8.1 Emotions and group work

When you encounter group work at university, it is helpful to reflect on your past experiences. What have they taught you about yourself and others? What is something that you wish went differently? It may be worth revisiting the chapter on self-efficacy (Chapter 2), particularly the questions of self-efficacy judgements. In the past, you may have felt overwhelmed or unclear about your role within the group. Or, you may have known what you wanted to accomplish, but felt let down by your peers. These experiences may have left you feeling inadequate, upset, like you are not enough, or that you were misunderstood. Understanding exactly why and how you felt this way will help you navigate uncomfortable emotions when you enter your next group work situation.

Being upfront and honest about your feelings can be an effective way to avoid misunderstandings and help you process uncomfortable emotions. However, it is important to consider how you are going to do this. Aim to discuss the situation as respectfully as possible, and avoid placing unwarranted blame on your peers. Sentence starters such as these can be quite helpful:

- “In past group projects, I struggled with [issue], so I’d just like to be upfront about [how to solve the issue]”
- “It would be good to be clear on who is doing what in this group, especially since...”
- “To make this work well, it would be good to know what our expectations are around [specific aspect]”
- “I’ve found that setting ground rules early can really help...”
- “With other group work situations, I’ve found that being proactive about [specific aspect] made a big difference.”

These sentence starters might be a bit robotic, so try to put them into your own words. The key is to be respectful in your communication.

Additionally, being a part of a group offers you a chance to support your members in a way that could really help them. Remembering that their experiences may be emotionally challenging, and offering understanding not only increases your confidence but also improves the overall group dynamic.

[Learning Activity 8.1 Reflecting on your past experiences \[PDF\]](#)

Reflect on the times that you have engaged in group work. If you do not have any group work experiences, think about the discussions and collaborative elements of your course or unit so far.

What emotional responses come up for you when working with others? Try to be as specific about your emotions as possible. Rather than using general words like 'angry' or 'happy', try to use more descriptive words such as 'fearful' or 'accepted'.

What do these emotional responses reveal about how you navigate group work?

Why do you think you feel this way, and how can you use this knowledge to improve your future group work experience?

What strengths do you have when working in this space?

8.2 Successfully navigating group work

It is crucial when working in groups to aim for *equity* and not *equality*. Equality implies that all members contribute the same amount of work, but this is often unrealistic. For example, if one person struggles with reading and the task requires reading 10 pages, there is already a disparity in effort. The same applies to students who struggle to be clear in their writing. Equity, or a situation where everyone's individual skills and preferences can be considered, is preferable. All students may research and write in the assessment, but one student who is more confident in writing may help with editing techniques, while another may help better explain a complex idea. The important aspect of successful group work here is being clear about what you and others can contribute and feeling comfortable in the roles each person chooses.

With equity in mind, it is important to embrace group differences. It can be difficult to see that every group member can add value at times, but that is the reality. Generally, every student wants to do well, or, at least, does not want to fail, which is why aiming to give your group members the benefit of the doubt is important. Discussing how much effort each student is willing to invest helps manage expectations.

It may be beneficial to revisit Chapter 6 on feedback as much of it applies here. Remember that group work and the feedback you receive are about the assessment and not the individual. As always, clear communication is key.

Conflict is both inevitable and a normal part of group work. In fact, it can sometimes be desirable. Studies show that groups that question and discuss ideas often produce work of higher quality (Clarke & Blissenden, 2013). Be open to having your ideas challenged and discussed, respectfully of course. Growth takes time, and you may not be ready to address certain aspects of yourself immediately, which is why a contingency is important.

Thinking about what you might do if the group work project does not work out is an important step in taking responsibility for your learning journey. While a contingency may require more work than expected, it is often unavoidable as you attempt to cobble together a viable response to the assessment. Be sure you discuss any issues with your lecturer or tutor and include your plan for assessment completion. This may require you to ask for an extension, which is always best done before the assessment deadline.

Whether your group work experience is enjoyable or challenging, planning is essential. Be realistic about

your deadlines and avoid committing to tasks you are unsure you can complete within the timeframe. Realistic timeframes are crucial and can help address issues quickly, especially if a group member struggles to complete their part. Timeliness, flexibility, and contingency plans are crucial for successful group work.

8.3 Group work roles

Students in group work environments tend to fall into one of four different roles: chairperson, project manager, record keeper, and timekeeper. These roles represent important functions for group success, and understanding how they function can help you to decide how best to contribute.

The chairperson runs meetings, keeps the team focused, maintains equity, and often delegates tasks. They are essentially the managers and leaders of the group.

The project manager oversees the project completion, defines roles, keeps the team focused on goals, and maintains timelines. They look at *how* everything can be completed on time.

The record keeper maintains detailed notes on what each group member will complete, they take minutes/notes, organise emails and meetings and, manage access to documents. They compile work and finalise submissions.

The timekeeper schedules meetings, creates timelines, and ensures everyone is progressing on schedule.

Of course, this list is not definitive, other functions are also prevalent within groups. For example, having a *sceptic*, who asks questions and helps to clarify meaning, or a *conciliator*, who manages conflict and disagreements fairly, are often roles taken on by the chairperson or project manager. In many group work scenarios, students may assume one, two, or even three of these roles. These roles can be discussed before the project begins and even swapped between students as the assessment progresses. If certain roles are unfulfilled, issues may arise. For example: without having a record keeper, group members might become confused about their tasks, and without a chairperson, the group may lack focus. Each role has a function and understanding them can help you identify what is missing if problems arise.

8.4 Dysfunctional group work roles

There is such a thing as dysfunctional group work roles, as explored by Turner et al., (2011). Dysfunctional roles make it difficult for the group, usually slowing or halting progress. There are a few common dysfunctional roles as discussed by Turner et al., (2011):

- *The Aggressor* is overly critical and will blame others for anything that has gone wrong, making the other team members feel inadequate.
- *The Blocker* blocks ideas and halts group progress.
- *The Rebel* will not cooperate with the group and will behave differently from what is expected in a group work environment.
- *The Self-Seeker* attempts to centre themselves in the group to ensure the focus is on them without taking any responsibility.

- *The Dominator* will try to control the group.
- *The Social Loafer* does not commit to the group and will usually make no contributions.

While other students might take on these roles, they may still change their behaviour with honest and clear communication. As discussed above, try to avoid any blaming language and discuss what is happening in a clear and concise way. Explain how you feel about the situation and try to focus on what is best for the assessment.

Learning Activity 8.2 Group work roles [PDF]

It may be useful to identify which roles you tend to take on when you are in a group. This questionnaire may provide you with some insight.

Answer the following questions honestly to discover which group work roles you are most suited to. Circle the option that best reflects your typical behaviour.

1. **How do you usually approach group discussions?**
 - a. I like to keep everyone on track and ensure the discussion remains focused.
 - b. I make sure everyone knows their tasks and that deadlines are clear.
 - c. I take notes and ensure everyone's contributions are recorded and accessible.
 - d. I organise meeting times and remind the group of deadlines.
2. **How do you respond when a group member raises a concern or problem?**
 - a. I mediate and try to ensure that all viewpoints are considered fairly.
 - b. I suggest ways to adapt the plan to address the concern.
 - c. I document the issue and keep a record for future reference.
 - d. I check the schedule to see how we can make adjustments without falling behind.
3. **Which of these tasks do you enjoy most?**
 - a. Leading the team and ensuring equity during group activities.
 - b. Breaking down the project into clear goals and assigning roles.
 - c. Organising and managing group documents, emails, and notes.
 - d. Creating schedules and ensuring meetings and deadlines are met.
4. **If your group struggles to stay organised, what do you do?**
 - a. Step in to ensure the discussion is productive and tasks are assigned.
 - b. Refocus the group on the overall objectives and timelines.
 - c. Clarify what has been decided so far and document next steps.
 - d. Review the schedule and suggest time adjustments to stay on track.

Tally up the number of times you answered a, b, c, or d. Each letter corresponds to a particular project role type:

a = Chairperson

b = Project Manager

c = Record Keeper

d = Timekeeper

The role with the highest score indicates your primary role within group work situations.

- Does the response to this questionnaire resonate with you?
- Have you ever found yourself taking on any of the dysfunctional roles (e.g., aggressor, blocker, rebel, self-seeker, dominator, social loafer)? If yes, reflect on why this might have happened.
- What steps can you take to improve your role within group settings and contribute to the success of the team?

8.5 Benefits of group work

Despite many students' reluctance to engage in group work, it does offer benefits. The most obvious advantage is its role in preparing you for the workforce. All occupations have an element of collaboration, and university might be the first opportunity to experience this with other adults. Negotiation skills, trying different roles and addressing your emotions are effective strategies for successfully navigating group work.

Working in a group gives you the chance to hear other perspectives and challenge your own. While having your ideas and values challenged might be uncomfortable, it is crucial to take this opportunity to learn and grow. Challenging your values, beliefs, and biases is a transformative aspect of attending university and develops your skills in critical thinking and reflection. Group work not only exposes you to the perspectives of others, but also encourages you to genuinely listen to their ideas.

Group work allows you to take on different roles. You may not initially feel you can lead a group, but having the opportunity helps you develop your confidence. Seizing these opportunities to develop your skills and to grow is a valuable experience.

Being part of a group allows you to work towards a common goal. This feeling of camaraderie can motivate you and increase a positive association with collaborative tasks. Realising that others share your passion for a topic, and that this passion is contagious, can help you feel less isolated in your educational journey.

Additionally, group work offers the opportunity to support your peers, showing compassion and understanding, while also allowing you to receive support. Many of us struggle to accept support or ask for

help, and group work can address this challenge. Being honest with yourself and others about what you can and cannot do is an important part of striving to be an independent learner.

While uncomfortable, group work is a common feature of university, and even more prevalent in the professional world. Understanding that this discomfort leads to productive struggle can help you reframe your thinking, making it easier to embrace the benefits and grow as a learner.

8.6 Key strategies from this chapter

- *Embrace equity over equality*: Instead of expecting equal effort from all members, focus on equity by accommodating individual strengths, skills, and preferences.
- *Communicate clearly*: Openly and clearly discuss group expectations early on. Set ground rules, and be proactive about expressing concerns or issues using respectful language.
- *Understand group roles*: Recognise which roles you and your peers are taking, and consider adopting roles based on your strengths.
- *Seize opportunities*: Group work offers opportunities to grow and learn from the perspectives of others. Try to reframe your thinking to see group work as an opportunity.
- *Reflect on your past experiences*: Identify how your emotional responses impact your approach and use that knowledge to help you successfully navigate group work tasks.

8.7 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have:

- understood the importance of key group roles, chairperson, project manager, record keeper, and timekeeper and their functions in making group work successful.
- understood the impact of dysfunctional roles in groups.
- considered the importance of equity over equality.
- discussed the benefits of group work, including its relationship with the professional world and academia.
- used group work as a method to develop critical thinking and reflection by challenging your values, beliefs, and biases.

- understood that conflict is normal in group settings and can be productive when managed respectfully.
- reframed group work as an opportunity to give and receive support.

8.8 Reflection questions

- What roles do you usually take on in group work, and why? How do these roles align with your strengths?
- Think of a time when conflict arose in a group setting. How was it resolved, and what could have been done differently?
- Reflect on a group project where equity was not considered. How could the group have approached the task more fairly?
- What personal biases or assumptions have you encountered or challenged through group work? How did this affect your perspective?
- How do you feel about receiving support? What might make it easier for you to ask for and receive help?
- What strategies can you employ to better handle the emotional challenges of group work in the future?

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I would love to hear your thoughts on this chapter, [share your feedback](#).

CHAPTER 9: DEALING WITH ANXIETY AND DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Liam Frost-Camilleri

Learning Objectives

- Recognise the importance of emotional intelligence and how it relates to emotional regulation, resilience, and well-being.
- Identify the key components of emotional intelligence using models such as Goleman's clusters and Cooper & Petrides' dimensions.
- Understand the role of emotional vocabulary and its significance in identifying and processing emotions.
- Develop strategies for building emotional intelligence and resilience to manage anxiety.

You may have noticed that much of this textbook is concerned with navigating emotions. Arguably, frustration with the lack of resources of this nature was the primary reason for writing this textbook. This is because emotional regulation always precedes academic expectation. Being emotionally regulated ensures that you have the capacity to deal with any issues that may arise, and to recognise, identify, and work through your emotions, you need to be emotionally intelligent.

This section explores the recognition and development of emotional intelligence and resilience, however, it is important to note that not scoring highly on an emotional intelligence test, or reading ideas in this chapter that are new and challenging, does not mean you are 'unintelligent'. 'Intelligence' is simply the term that we use to discuss this idea.

9.1 Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence tends to reside in three overlapping areas: being aware of your emotions, being able to manage your emotions, and having positive relationships with others. Being aware of your emotions requires you to be in tune with your body, paying attention to how it reacts to different situations while understanding how your past experiences may inform these reactions. Being able to manage your emotions does not mean ignoring or removing them; it means being able to 'ride the wave' of emotion without it

causing distress or dysregulation. Having positive relationships with others refers to expressing empathy and maintaining satisfying and comfortable connections. Reflect on how aware you are of your emotions, if you successfully regulate yourself, and if your emotions impact your relationships.

Research has found many benefits to being emotionally intelligent, including higher levels of contentment and better navigation of the workplace. This chapter introduces two main models that explain emotional intelligence well.

Goleman et al. (2002) developed a model that discusses four clusters that encapsulate emotional intelligence. These clusters are:

Self-awareness. Having an awareness of your own emotional state, which includes accurate self-assessment and self-confidence.

Self-management. Exercising self-control, maintaining honesty and integrity, and being flexible and adaptive to the emotions you are feeling.

Social awareness. Empathising with others, being aware of emotional currents in everyday life, and recognising the emotional needs of others.

Relationship management. Leading and developing other students, persuading with integrity, resolving conflict, and building connections with others.

Each of these clusters is quite complex, but this snapshot gives you an idea of what Goleman et al. (2002) aimed for when they described the various facets of emotional intelligence. Goldman's research highlights that people with high emotional intelligence enjoy more financial stability, are more productive, and tend to build more supportive work environments (Goleman et al., 2022).

Another framework worth considering was created by Copper and Petrides (2010), who also incorporates four dimensions:

Well-being. A sense of well-being about the past, present, and future, leading to happiness and fulfilment.

Self-control. The ability to control urges and desires.¹

Emotionality. The ability to perceive and express your emotions while using them to aid your relationships.

Sociability. The development and maintenance of relationships, with a focus on social rather than romantic ones.

There are also emotional intelligence tests that can be taken to give you an idea of areas you could develop. This test uses Goleman's clusters model discussed above: <https://globalleadershipfoundation.com/geit/eitest.html>. This survey might not be the most accurate, but the results may give you an indication of what you would like to focus on.

From these models we can start to understand how to grow our emotional intelligence. There is more on this idea below, but in the meantime, we need to acknowledge that developing emotional intelligence

1. It is worth noting here that anybody reading this with ADHD that a lack of ability to control urges is more due to lower dopamine levels than emotional intelligence. Many of these theories are based in psychology and tends to use a neurotypical understanding of concepts.

is challenging and takes time. A strong first step is learning emotional-specific vocabulary to help you accurately discuss your emotions.

9.2 Emotional vocabulary and literacy

An emotions wheel organises a spectrum of human emotions into a ‘wheel’ configuration, making it easier to connect the labels of related emotions. The first emotions wheel was created by psychologist Richard Plutchik who placed eight overarching emotions in the centre, and linked them to other more complex emotions, as can be seen in this figure below (Plutchik, 1980).

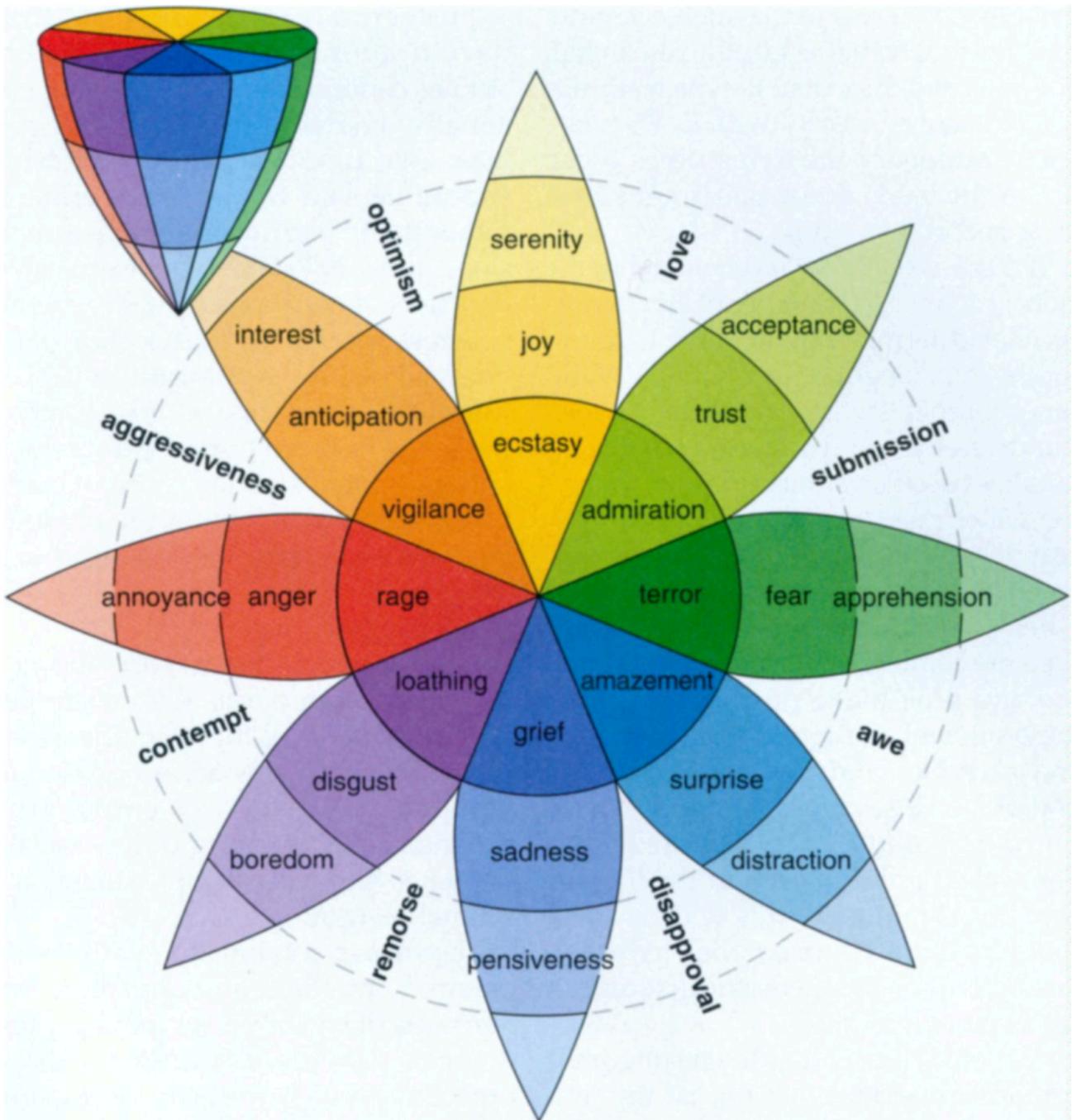


Figure 13. Plutchik's Emotions Wheel. From: "The nature of emotions," by R. Plutchik, (2001). *American Scientist* 89(4), p. 345 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27857503> . Copyright The Scientific Research Society. Reproduced with permission.

Plutchik's concept inspired a variety of different emotional wheels that can help develop your vocabulary. Some are divided into comfortable and uncomfortable emotions, while others simply discuss feelings in general. There are many emotion wheels available, and they all have merit. Here is another example to help you learn the vocabulary needed to discuss emotions effectively.

For instance, you might not equate feeling ‘sensitive’ with feeling ‘happy’, or feeling ‘fragile’ with feeling ‘sad’. Discussing where these emotions *fit* in with your individual experience is an important part of developing a meaningful emotional vocabulary. Now that you have a better understanding of emotional vocabulary, it is time to discuss how to develop emotional intelligence and resilience.

Learning Activity 9.1 Your own emotions wheel [PDF]

Using the template in the downloadable pdf, create your own emotions wheel. Try to identify a series of primary emotions that you can break down into more specific ones. Reflect on your choices and which emotions were harder for you to break down than others. What might this tell you about your ability to identify and work with emotions?

9.3 Resilience and developing emotional intelligence

Resilience and emotional intelligence are related terms. While emotional intelligence refers to understanding and regulating your emotions and connections, resilience involves having the tenacity to continue trying despite challenges (Chung et al., 2017). Many of the tools that you have encountered so far connect strongly with building resilience and emotional intelligence, such as developing a growth mindset, or curating self-efficacy (Margo et al., 2019). But there are other ways you can develop important skills as follows:

Self-care. Caring for yourself requires responding to *your* needs, ensuring you have the capacity to handle your responsibilities and tasks. Self-care looks different for each person, so it is important to remain curious in this area.²

Help seeking behaviours. Understanding that you are not alone in your journey is an important aspect of emotional intelligence and resilience. People who are emotionally intelligent and resilient do not try to ‘go at it alone’ and actively seek help when they need it.

Exposure to challenges. Successfully navigating challenges builds your confidence and resilience. These challenges should be approached with appropriate supports, but success in one area can help you apply similar strategies to other situations.

Seeing others navigate challenges. Having others model how they navigate challenges provides strategies

2. A note for any parents who struggle in this area. It can be very difficult to find time when you are responsible for a little one, so it would be worth mustering any supports you can and maybe finding smaller ways to care for yourself.

and knowledge that you can use. It is important not to focus on the differences between yourself and the other person in this process, as this can prevent you from internalising the successful strategies they used.

Reflection diaries. Keeping a diary about your emotions and challenges has been known to develop both emotional intelligence and resilience. This diary does not have to be formal and can be a video diary if you feel more comfortable.

Sleep hygiene. Sleep hygiene is crucial for building your capacity for resilience. Consider your sleep schedule, and try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. Develop a routine before bedtime to help you wind down. Limit screen exposure before bed to help reset your melatonin, the sleep hormone. Create a comfortable sleep environment, and limit naps taken during the day. Sleep hygiene may take time to develop, but it is essential in your journey toward resilience and emotional intelligence.

There is a clear connection in the research literature between resilience, student academic success and general well-being (Chung et al., 2017). The challenges you face are complex, requiring a complex response to navigate them successfully. For this reason, sharing what we know with others and paying attention to how resilience is modelled are especially helpful strategies (Margo et al., 2019). Another important way you can develop your resilience effectively is by addressing anxiety.

Learning Activity 9.2 Keeping a diary of emotions [PDF]

Spend a week keeping a diary of your emotions. This diary can be created online or handwritten. Try to write in your diary at key points throughout your day, such as in the morning, at midday, and at night. When the week is over, complete a reflection that considers the emotions you felt throughout the week. Did you find any patterns? Which emotions were the most troubling for you and what might you do to address them in the future?

9.4 Addressing anxiety

As we are discussing the importance of recognising and regulating emotions, it is imperative to consider one of the most commonly uncomfortable emotions that many students experience: anxiety. This section is not referring to clinical or diagnosed anxiety disorders, and the following is not medical advice. This section is only written in the context of feeling anxious when beginning a university course.

As established earlier in this textbook, experiencing anxiety can provide valuable information about what is happening for you emotionally. Before we discuss how to manage your anxiety, it is important to understand that we do not get rid of anxiety, we merely manage it, and managing anxiety can be different for each of us. The following strategies were developed by academic Olivia Remes, who has spent much of her research looking into ways that anxiety can be regulated scientifically.

Recognise it. The first step in addressing your anxiety is what is sometimes called ‘name it to tame it’, or simply recognising the anxiety you are feeling. Remes (2021) explains that anxiety is both a feeling of fear and restlessness. Think about how these two feelings appear in your body so when you feel anxious, you can recognise it early.

Self-control. Remes (2021) endorses the idea of developing good habits and suggests that self-control is like any other muscle, the more you use it, the stronger it will become. Interestingly, the research demonstrates that exercising self-control in one aspect of your life can make other areas easier to control.

Set boundaries. The setting of boundaries can be as small as removing the news from your phone or politely declining a social invitation when you need to spend time looking after yourself. Setting boundaries is something you need to consider for yourself, and lowering access to, or time spent in, anxious situations helps to lower your anxiety (Remes, 2021).

Embrace the environment. There is a lot of research on the healing effects of going outside and into nature. Some research even indicates that looking at pictures of nature can reduce anxiety. Remes (2021) takes this one step further to focus on the senses while in nature. Crumbling leaves in your hand, and feeling rocks or bark can all help you feel more connected to nature and less anxious.

Mindfulness and meditation. There is such an abundance of information about meditation and mindfulness that this textbook only focuses on the basics as a starting point. The research tells us that meditation and mindfulness not only alleviate stress, but can lower blood pressure, strengthen your brain, and increase your capacity for compassion. But mindfulness and meditation does not have to be done in the corner of a room with incense, low light, and calming music. You can be mindful in many situations, like while washing the dishes, or while you stare outside finishing your cup of coffee. The important point is to take opportunities to be mindful when you can. If you want to move into mindfulness more, but are unsure where to start, joining a local meditation group could be a good first step.

Do it badly. The idea of ‘doing it badly’ refers to removing expectations of doing something perfectly the first time. Being self-compassionate in this way gives you freedom from procrastination and indecision, allowing you to develop your skills slowly (Remes, 2021).

Self-compassion and forgiveness. As Remes (2021) argues, we often find it easier to be compassionate towards others than to ourselves. Reflecting on the critique you are giving yourself and asking whether you would give that critique to someone else could help you muster self-compassion. Learning how to forgive yourself can break your cycle of self-criticism.

Exercise. There is a lot of research that supports the benefits of exercising for lifting mood. Remes (2021) offers the advice of combining ‘do it badly’ with exercise, making you feel less self-conscious and more able to overcome potential barriers to physical activity.

Creating positive activities. Remes (2021) emphasises the importance of planning activities that bring positivity to your life. Given how stressful our lives can be, planning for positive situations can have a remarkable effect on our ability to regulate anxiety.

Other research discusses the importance of diet, challenging negative self-talk, and advocating for yourself when trying to regulate anxious emotions. You will notice that many of these practices are exercises to do *before* you feel anxious. Meditating while you are in a heightened state is only effective if you are well-practised at meditation. Practising something when you are emotionally neutral makes it easier to do

when you are feeling anxious. In the meantime, think of ways that help you calm down and feel positive, whether that is dinner with friends, gaming, or going for a run. Pay attention to how these strategies help you regulate and build resilience, and use them often.

Developing your emotional intelligence, vocabulary, resilience, and capacity to regulate anxiety are all rather large tasks that take time and patience. Be compassionate with yourself in this space and try developing these skills through journaling, reflecting, and discussing with others.

9.5 Key strategies from this chapter

- *Understand emotional intelligence:* Becoming aware of your emotions, managing them, and developing relationships are all effective ways of improving your emotional intelligence.
- *Build emotional vocabulary:* Acknowledge and work through your emotions using tools like an emotions wheel to expand your vocabulary and increase your emotional intelligence.
- *Build resilience:* Build your skills in resilience by prioritising self-care, help seeking behaviours, exposing yourself to challenge, reflective journaling, and sleep hygiene.
- *Manage your anxiety:* By recognising and acknowledging your anxieties, exercising self-control, setting boundaries, embracing nature, practicing mindfulness and self-compassion, and exercising regularly, you can work to manage your anxieties.

9.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have:

- explored how emotional intelligence encompasses three key areas: being aware of emotions, managing them, and maintaining positive relationships.
- examined the role emotional vocabulary plays in understanding and processing emotions.
- discussed how the concepts of resilience and emotional intelligence are related.
- examined how managing anxiety is a key aspect of emotional regulation, particularly in stressful situations like starting university.

- explored strategies for managing anxiety including recognising anxiety early, setting boundaries, engaging with nature, practising mindfulness, and embracing self-compassion and exercise.
- understood how developing emotional intelligence, resilience, and anxiety management takes time, patience, and self-compassion.

9.7 Reflection questions

- How aware are you of your emotions in different situations, and how do they impact your behaviour and decision-making?
- When faced with emotional challenges, what strategies do you currently use to manage your them? Are they effective?
- How would you describe your emotional vocabulary? Do you feel you have the language to accurately express your feelings?
- In what ways have you demonstrated resilience in your academic or personal life? How can you strengthen this skill?
- What methods have you found most effective in managing anxiety? How might you improve your anxiety regulation in the future?
- How can you incorporate self-compassion into your daily life, especially when dealing with emotional challenges or failures?
- How can you become more mindful in everyday situations?

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CHAPTER 10: CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Liam Frost-Camilleri

Learning Objectives

- Define diversity and cultural competency.
- Explore how cultural competency can be developed.
- Define and explain the concept of cultural competence, especially in relation to First Nations cultures in Australia.
- Understand the importance of cultural responsiveness when interacting with people from diverse backgrounds in academic settings.
- Identify and describe support services available to First Nations students in Australian universities, both formal and informal.
- Explain the significance of Yarning as a communication method in First Nations cultures and how it can enhance learning and support networks.
- Analyse the concept of two-way learning and its role in promoting mutual cultural understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.
- Apply inclusive language and terminology when discussing or writing about First Nations Australians, respecting their cultural identity and experiences.

This chapter is intended to introduce you to the concept of cultural competence, with a focus on First Nations experience as a case study. Cultural competence is the ability to understand, respect, and interact with people from other cultures and belief systems. At university, you will meet many people from different backgrounds, and it is important that you are able to interact in a considerate and respectful manner. This chapter provides a starting point for these conversations.

10.1 What is diversity?

Diversity refers to the great variety of human characteristics. Ways that we are different even though we are all human and share more similarities than differences. These differences are an essential part of what enriches humanity. Aspects of diversity may be cultural, biological, or personal in nature. Diversity generally involves things that may significantly affect some people's perceptions of others; not just any way

people happen to be different. For example, having different tastes in music, movies, or books is not what we usually refer to as diversity.

When discussing diversity, it is often difficult to avoid seeming to generalise about different types of people, and such generalisations can seem similar to dangerous stereotypes. The following descriptions are meant only to suggest that individuals are different from other individuals in many possible ways and that we can all learn things from people whose ideas, beliefs, attitudes, values, backgrounds, experiences, and behaviours are different from our own. The following are various aspects of diversity:

Race

Race refers to what we generally think of as biological differences and is often defined by what some think of as skin colour. Such perceptions are often at least as social as they are biological.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a cultural distinction that is different from race. Ethnic groups share a common identity and a perceived cultural heritage that often involves shared ways of speaking and behaving, religion, traditions, and other traits. The term “ethnic” also refers to such a group that is a minority within the larger society. Race and ethnicity are sometimes interrelated but not automatically so.

Cultural background

Culture, like ethnicity, refers to shared characteristics, language, beliefs, behaviours, and identity. We are all influenced by our culture to some extent. While ethnic groups are typically smaller groups within a larger society, the larger society itself is often called the “dominant culture.” The term is often used rather loosely to refer to any group with identifiable shared characteristics.

Geography

People from different places often have a range of differences in ideas, attitudes, and behaviours.

Socioeconomic background

People’s identities are influenced by how they grow up, and part of that background involves socioeconomic factors. Socioeconomic diversity can contribute to a wide variety of ideas and attitudes.

Gender roles

Women hold virtually all professional and social roles, including those once dominated by men, and men have taken on many roles, such as raising a child, that were formerly occupied mostly by women. These changing roles have brought diverse new ideas and attitudes to university campuses.

Gender identity

Gender identity is each person’s internal and individual experience of gender. It is a person’s sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither, or anywhere along the gender spectrum. A person’s gender identity may be the same as or different from their birth-assigned sex.

Age

While younger students attending university immediately after high school are generally within the same age range, older students returning to school bring a diversity of ages. Because they often have broader life experiences, many older students bring different ideas and attitudes to the campus.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is a personal characteristic that forms part of who you are. It covers the range of

human sexuality from lesbian and gay, to bisexual and heterosexual. Exposure to this diversity helps others overcome stereotypes and become more accepting of human differences.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is a term coined in the 1990s to fight stigma against people with autism, ADHD, and learning differences like dyslexia. It is used to describe the differences in the way people's brains work. The idea is that there's no "correct" way for the brain to work. Instead, there is a wide range of ways that people perceive and respond to the world.

These are just some of the types of diversity you are likely to encounter on university classes and in our society generally.

10.2 Cultural competency

Cultural competency can be defined as the ability to recognise and adapt to cultural differences and similarities. It involves "(a) the cultivation of deep cultural self-awareness and understanding (i.e., how one's own beliefs, values, perceptions, interpretations, judgments, and behaviours are influenced by one's cultural community or communities) and (b) increased cultural other-understanding (i.e., comprehension of the different ways people from other cultural groups make sense of and respond to the presence of cultural differences)" (Bennett, 2015).

In other words, cultural competency requires you to be aware of your own cultural practices, values, and experiences, and to be able to read, interpret, and respond to those of others. Such awareness will help you successfully navigate the cultural differences you will encounter in diverse environments. Cultural competency is critical to working and building relationships with people from different cultures; it is so critical, in fact, that it is now one of the most highly desired skills in the modern workforce (Bennett, 2015).

Acknowledge your own uniqueness, for you are diverse, too. Diversity doesn't involve just other people. Consider that you may be just as different from other people as they are from you. Don't think of the other person as being the one who is different, that you are somehow the "norm." Consider your own (possibly unconscious) stereotypes. A stereotype is a fixed, simplistic view of what people in a certain group are like. It is often the basis for prejudice and discrimination: behaving differently toward someone because you stereotype them in some way. Stereotypes are generally learned and emerge in the dominant culture's attitudes toward those from outside that dominant group. Thinking about stereotypes is the first step in breaking out of these irrational thought patterns. Do not try to ignore differences among people. Some people try so hard to avoid stereotyping that they go to the other extreme and try to avoid seeing any differences at all among people. But as we have seen throughout this chapter, people are different in many ways, and we should acknowledge that if we are to experience the benefits of diversity.

Develop cultural sensitivity for communication. Realize that your words may not mean quite the same thing in different cultural contexts or to individuals from different backgrounds. This is particularly true of slang words, which you should generally avoid until you are sure the other person will know what you mean. Never try to use slang or expressions you think are common in the cultural group of the person you are speaking with. Similarly, since body language often varies among different cultures, avoid strong

gestures and expressions until the responses of the other person signify they will not misinterpret the messages sent by your body language.

Take the initiative in social interactions. Many students naturally hang out with other students they are most like; that almost seems to be part of human nature. Even when we are open-minded and want to learn about others different from ourselves, it often seems easier and more comfortable to interact with others of the same age, cultural group, and so on. If we do not make a small effort to meet others, however, we miss a great opportunity to learn and increase our understanding. Next time you are looking around the classroom for someone to ask about a class you missed or to study together for a test or group project, choose someone different from you in some way. Making friends with others of different backgrounds is often one of the most fulfilling experiences for university students.

Work through conflicts as in any other interaction. Conflicts simply occur among people, whether of the same or different backgrounds. If you are afraid of making a mistake when interacting with someone from a different background, you might avoid interaction altogether, and thus miss the benefits of diversity. Nothing risked, nothing gained. If you are sincere and respect the other, there is less risk of a misunderstanding occurring. If a conflict does occur, work to resolve it as you would any other tension with another person.

Developing your cultural competency will help you be more in tune with the cultural nuances and differences present in any situation. It is also the first step in being able to appreciate the benefits diversity can bring to a situation.

10.3 Culture

Culture is a multifaceted construct that contains ever-changing worldviews, traditions, beliefs, knowledge and relationships that underpin a group's actions and perspectives (Hargraves, 2022). While culture exemplified in cuisine or attire, it delves deeper and can be seen in behaviours associated with values, beliefs, social roles and communication. Culture can be collectively nurtured and shared among groups that are unified by history, geography, linguistics, religious beliefs or socio-economic status. However, culture remains fluid and multifaceted. Individuals can have different experiences and perspectives even within the same culture, which leads to differences among individuals within the same cultural group.

The basic understanding of culture can be used to better appreciate and empathise with the different cultures you encounter at university. Remembering that stereotypes can be quite unhelpful when trying to connect with others from diverse cultural backgrounds.

10.4 Communicating with diverse cultures

Because universities are a melting pot of different cultures, learning to communicate with people of different backgrounds becomes very important. Recognising that cultural differences influence how people perceive and interpret communication is an important aspect of communicating with respect. For example, some cultures may engage in direct communication, while others avoid confrontation. Similarly, body

language can have different meanings across cultures. Try to keep an open and respectful mind when communicating with people of different cultures. Here are some tips to help you communicate with respect:

Listen. Listening shows respect and demonstrates your willingness to engage with cultural differences.

Ask questions thoughtfully. Whenever you ask questions about another person's culture, make sure you do so respectfully to demonstrate genuine interest and mutual understanding.

Avoid assumptions and stereotypes. There is a danger of what is called the 'single story'. Cultures are complex and individual, so avoid assuming that the behaviours or beliefs of your peers fully align with generalisations about their cultural background.

Use inclusive language. Try to avoid culture-specific language or expressions when you speak, as many jargon terms or slang phrases do not translate well across cultures.

Patience and empathy. Being patient and empathetic to those around you demonstrates that you are willing to develop your understanding of other cultures.

Developing respectful cultural communication skills is an ongoing but rewarding process. Often, universities are seen as spaces to develop cultural competence, opening our eyes to the rich diversity of the world. The next section discusses the experiences of First Nations students in Australia and offers insights into becoming more inclusive.

[Learning Activity 10.1 Cultural reflection journal \[PDF\]](#)

Reflect on your own cultural background by writing a journal entry that explores your values, traditions, and influences. How does your culture shape your worldview, behaviours, and interactions? Use this reflection to better understand your own cultural identity and how it compares to others you may encounter.

10.5 First Nations Success

Tertiary education is a crucial element in closing the education gap between First Nations students and non-Indigenous students. Higher levels of education have been linked to improved outcomes in employment, health, life expectancy, income, and mental well-being within First Nations communities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021). This section outlines several ways that First Nations students can build a deadly support network to help them reach their study goals, as well as provides support to non-Indigenous students wishing to improve their allyship when they study and work alongside First Nations Australians.

10.6 Building the 'uni' in comm-uni-ty

The Australian higher education sector has made several necessary commitments to moving towards reconciliation, decolonisation, and recognition of historical barriers in accessing education by First Nations people. To this end, many universities offer an array of supports to help First Nations students to successfully navigate and complete their study journey. These supports are both formal and informal and are typically enacted through specified roles within the university's structure, and through specific programs, units, and clubs. For First Nations students, it is important to access and utilise these services and supports when you feel like you may need some guidance in your studies. Accessing supports and resources early is the best way to maximise their impact; there is never any shame in asking for help.

Many Australian universities have a dedicated department or unit that specialises in First Nations student support. These units are culturally safe spaces for First Nations students to study, as well as to seek support from, or referrals to, a range of other services. Services may include:

- Admission and enrolment support.
- Orientation programs.
- Academic skills support.
- Indigenous tutoring schemes.
- Support with scholarships and bursaries.
- Accommodation assistance.
- Culturally safe advocacy.

In addition to a First Nations unit or department, many higher education institutions also embed First Nations-specific staff and roles throughout teaching teams, administrative services, and academic support. This ensures First Nations students are comprehensively supported throughout their institution. As a First Nations student, engaging with First Nations staff, services, and supports can be a very useful tool in improving your study experience and building your university support community.

As well as the formal supports mentioned above, there are several informal and social supports at university that First Nations students can often access while studying, including:

- Peer-to-peer learning and peer group study sessions.
- University friends.
- Mentors.
- Clubs and associations.
- Sports teams.

These informal supports are a great way to build positive relationships that can support your study, your well-being, and your overall university experience. Your university may host yarning circles, culture events, or celebrations, First Nations-specific peer-to-peer learning programs, and casual meetups for First Nations students and staff. You may also find that your Student Guild supports a First Nations student social club,

which can be a culturally safe space to talk about anything you wish, whether it be related to your studies or not.

Your university support community is just like your personal support mob. They are there to guide you and help you achieve your goals. So, reach out to your First Nations supports and start building your ‘uni mob’ today!

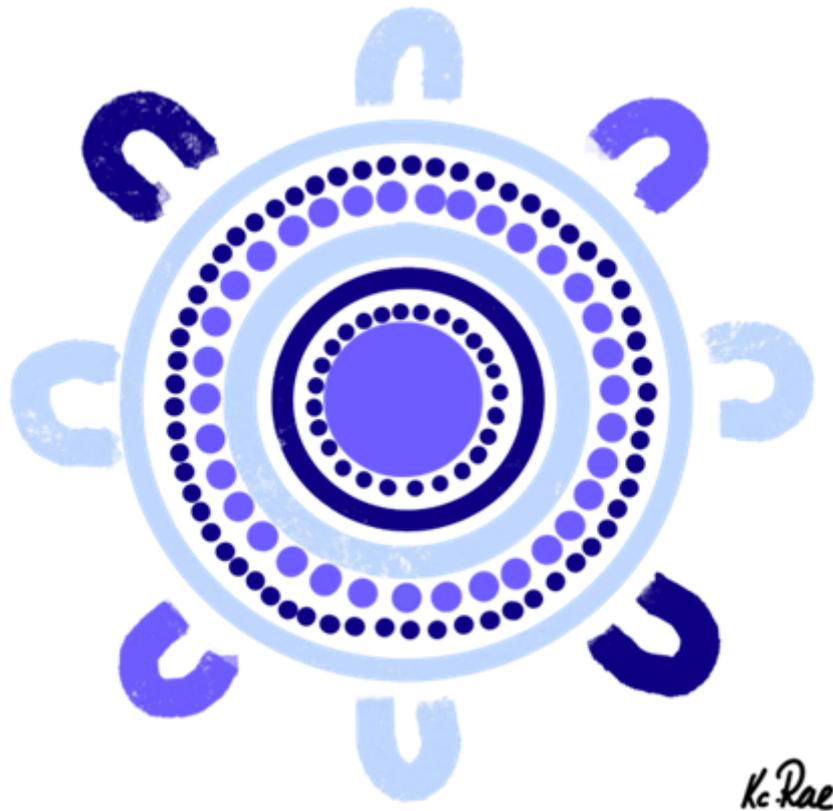


Figure 15. Uni Community. From First Nations success [Artwork], by K. Fahey, (2021), from Academic success. University of Queensland. Kc Rae Aboriginal Artist used under [CC-BY-NC-ND](#) license.

“This piece depicts how both your personal mob and your ‘uni mob’ provide wrap-around, holistic support as you journey through your study experience. While family, friends, Aunties, Uncles, Ancestors, lecturers, support officers, studypeers and First Nations uni programs all offer a variety of supports, they are all there to ensure that you not only succeed, but also enjoy your study experience.” Kc Rae, Aboriginal artist.

10.7 YaRN strong

Yarning is fundamental in establishing strong, reliable, and trustworthy connections in your university community. Whether it is yarning with your lecturers, peers, support staff, or tutors, it is important to be an active listener who is genuinely invested in hearing from other parties.

But what is yarning? Yarning is a valuable form of communication in Australian First Nations cultures and takes the form of one person speaking while another person, or group of people, genuinely and actively listens. Terare and Rawsthorne (2019) describe yarning as storytelling that utilises sound, silence, and non-verbal cues. Yarns can be quick, long, funny, serious, or informative, and their aim is to create knowledge, understanding, and genuine connection (Bessarab & Ngandu, 2010; Walker et. al., 2014). All yarns carry meaning (Phillips et al., 2018) and are useful in developing connections that support help-seeking during your study journey. You can use yarning to build peer relationships, seek out mentors, discuss the stressors of studying, share study tips and tricks, or share concerns about the challenges of working and being a student. Yarning aims to build a judgment-free dialogue that encourages knowledge-sharing and learning, and because of this, yarning has been shown to have positive impacts on one's health and well-being (Terare & Rawthorne, 2019). Therefore, yarning is useful in maintaining balance physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Yarning helps us learn from others and be reflective of those learnings. By engaging in yarning authentically, you are able to better engage with your 'uni mob' and create deeper and more meaningful connections that will help support you throughout your studies.

10.8 Two-way learning

Two-way learning, or both-way learning, is a learning paradigm which notes that there is togetherness to be found by non-Indigenous and First Nations people learning from each other's perspectives (Johnston & Forrest, 2020). Two-way learning encourages us to "walk in both worlds" and amplifies First Nations ways of knowing, being, and doing (Johnston & Forrest, 2020). If you are a non-Indigenous student, university is a fantastic time to engage in two-way learning as higher education institutes are often full of diverse students and staff who may wish to share their cultural knowledge with you, in an exchange of learning. If you are a First Nations student, two-way learning is a fantastic opportunity to share culture and knowledge, which supports truth-telling efforts and reduces individualised racism (Johnston & Forrest, 2020). Two-way learning benefits all parties involved by making them more engaged learners and more reflective communicators. Additionally, this learning process assists with decolonial efforts, advocacy and allyships, as well as awareness raising and education about First Nations cultures and practices (Johnston & Forrest, 2020).

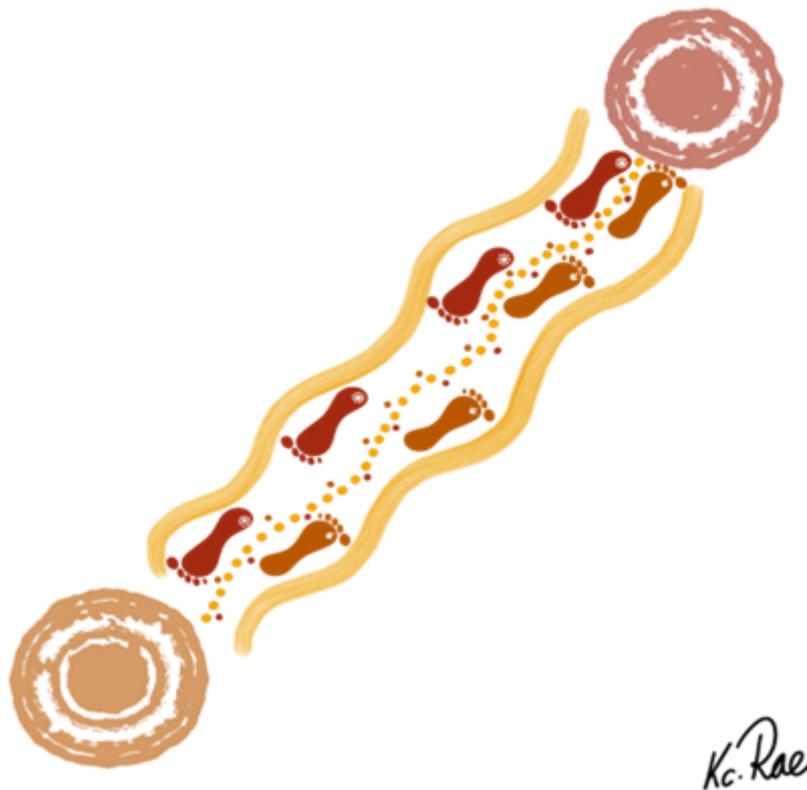


Figure 16. Sharing Both-Ways. From First Nations success [Artwork], K. Fahey, 2021. Academic success. University of Queensland. Kc Rae Aboriginal Artist used under [CC-BY-NC-ND](#) license.

“This image depicts the two-way or both-ways learning process. Notice how the footprints, or tracks, are travelling from both locations to the other? In this piece, a deep red represents one group, and a burnt orange another. Along their journey to each other’s site of knowledge, they are sharing their own ideas and experiences, depicted by the small dots in their associated colours. This piece reminds us that two-way learning is not a one—directional transaction.” Kc Rae, Aboriginal artist.

Learning Activity 10.2 Visualising two-way learning [PDF]

Choose a topic that interests you and research it from both an Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspective (for example, land management or health care). Research how Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities approach the topic by focusing on the values, methods, and knowledge unique to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives. Record your findings.

Use a Venn diagram or other graphic organiser to visually represent your findings by listing what is unique to the Indigenous perspective and the non-Indigenous perspective. In the overlapping section, include any shared ideas or practices and what each perspective can learn from the other.

Write a short paragraph below your diagram that explains how two-way learning fosters a deeper understanding of respect between cultures.

10.9 Inclusive language

Inclusive language is important in making everyone feel safe, valued, and respected. It is a powerful strategy of your academic writing toolkit that ensures your writing is relevant, accurate, and respectful (Diversity Council Australia, 2016). Learning how to write respectfully about First Nations Australians, their communities, and their cultures is a beneficial skill for all university students as it has applications throughout many industries and professions. Below are some examples to guide you in writing respectfully about First Nations Australians (see Figure 18). It is important to note that while there is no single guideline on when to utilise certain terms, or whether terms are interchangeable, your higher education institution may have a respectful languages guide or appropriate terminology guide that you can use to assist your writing. There are many terms in the table below that may not be familiar to you. To make sure you understand them and are using them appropriately you are encouraged to do some additional reading, and talk with a First Nations advisor or support officer at your university.

Figure 17. Guide to Writing Respectfully. From First Nations success. K. Fahey, (2021). Academic success. University of Queensland. Reproduced under CC BY NC SA 4.0

Category	Inclusive and Appropriate Terminology
People and positions	Aboriginal* Torres Strait Islander* First Nations* First Peoples* First Australians* Indigenous* Elders* Aunty* Uncle* Country Specific (e.g., Kamilaroi* people)
Nations and groups	Country (e.g., Wakka Wakka Country*) Traditional Custodians* Traditional Owners* Land (e.g., Bundjalung land)
Historical events and truth-telling	Invasion Colonisation Stolen Invasion Day* Day of Mourning* Survival Day* Pre-invasion history Pre-European history
Spirituality	The Dreaming* Dreaming stories Creation stories Spiritual beliefs Lore
Ceremonies and significant events	Smoking Ceremony Acknowledgment of Country* Welcome to Country* Sorry business Men's business Women's business

* As a sign of respect, these words or phrases should be capitalised at all times (Australian Public Service Commission, 2023; Australians Together, 2020).

10.10 Conclusion

Universities are places that welcome and include all students, including First Nations students. As a First Nations student there are many opportunities for you to connect with your 'uni mob' who will be there to support, guide, and celebrate with you as you work towards your study and career goals. As a non-Indigenous student, you can listen to, and learn from, First Nations perspectives and contribute to

inclusive environments. Whether you are a First Nations student or non-Indigenous student, university is a fantastic time to grow and build unique connections.

10.11 Key strategies from this chapter

- *Acknowledge diversity*: By first understanding your own cultural values and practices and then learning to interpret and respond to cultural differences.
- *Challenge cultural stereotypes*: By reflecting on your unconscious biases and stereotypes and acknowledging individual differences without generalising.
- *Better understand culture*: By listening empathetically, avoiding assumptions, using inclusive language, and practicing patience, you can begin to understand and appreciate cultures different from your own.
- *Build strong networks*: If you are from a minority culture, seek to build support networks through academic assistance spaces, orientation programs, peer-to-peer learning, or by joining a university club or cultural group.
- *Start Yarning*: By sharing knowledge and experiences and actively listening, you can foster trust, build connections, and support mental and emotional well-being.
- *Engage in two-way learning*: Exchange cultural knowledge through collaboration to promote mutual respect and understanding.
- *Use inclusive and respectful language*: Using inclusive language ensures people feel safe, respected, and valued.

10.12 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have:

- defined diversity and examined key aspects of diversity.
- introduced cultural competency and highlighted the importance of self-awareness and understanding others' cultural perspectives.
- explored culture as a dynamic and multifaceted concept that shapes worldviews, behaviours and interactions.

- examined how education plays a critical role in closing the gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous Australians.
- examined how First Nations students benefit from accessing formal university supports like tutoring schemes and peer learning programs, as well as informal networks such as social clubs and mentoring.
- explored how Yarning is a key communication practice in First Nations cultures, helping to build trust and foster meaningful connections that support students academically and socially.
- explored how two-way learning is a collaborative process that promotes mutual respect and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, enriching the educational experience and advancing decolonial efforts.
- discussed how using respectful, inclusive, and appropriate language when referring to First Nations people and culture is essential for fostering inclusivity and cultural competence at university.

10.13 Reflection questions

- What are some examples of diversity you have encountered in your daily life? How did these interactions shape your perspective?
 - How does acknowledging diversity challenge stereotypes and promote inclusion?
 - How does cultural competence benefit students in a university setting, particularly when engaging with people from diverse backgrounds?
 - Why is it important for First Nations students to build both formal and informal support networks during their university experience?
 - How does yarning differ from other forms of communication, and what advantages does it offer in building relationships within the university community?
 - In what ways can non-Indigenous students engage in two-way learning, and how might this contribute to greater cultural understanding?
 - Why is it essential to use inclusive and respectful language when discussing other cultures? How can this impact your academic writing and interpersonal interactions?
-

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CHAPTER 11: PERSEVERANCE AND REFLECTING ON YOUR JOURNEY

Liam Frost-Camilleri

Learning Objectives

- Explain Angela Duckworth's concept of GRIT and the four strategies to cultivate it.
- Reflect on your personal achievements and challenges during your university journey.
- Understand the importance of seeking support and identify key support networks at university.
- Develop strategies to foster perseverance through daily improvements, growth mindset, and purpose-driven efforts.
- Identify and reflect on the benefits of self-reflection in personal and academic growth.

Like resilience, having perseverance can help you continually strive towards a goal. The subtle difference between the terms is found in the notions of 'continuous effort' (perseverance) and 'recovering from setbacks' (resilience). The concept of 'GRIT' arguably offers the most comprehensive look at how perseverance can be developed. Additionally, persevering toward a long-term goal necessitates knowing when to ask for help and reflecting on your journey often to celebrate and better understand the challenges you have faced.

11.1 Developing GRIT

In the world of university, it is crucial to muster a continued effort towards your goals. As you progress through your studies, you will find that the assessments are longer, more intricate, and require more sustained effort and focus. This is where perseverance or 'GRIT' becomes an important skill to cultivate.

Angela Duckworth, a psychologist and researcher of perseverance, is interested in answering the question, 'who is successful and why?', leading her to develop the concept of GRIT, or, the sustained effort toward a lifelong goal with passion (Duckworth, 2016). Additionally, GRIT has a non-cognitive trait, meaning it is not based on inherent intelligence or talent but is rather malleable and not correlated with talent or IQ. The idea of GRIT has been influential, debunking the notion that talent is more important

than effort. Duckworth found that where talent counts once, effort counts twice, and she expresses this concept using a mathematical formula:

$$\text{Talent} \times \text{Effort} = \text{Skill}$$

$$\text{Skill} \times \text{Effort} = \text{Achievement}$$

These formulas illustrate how sustained effort leads to the achievement of goals and how relying solely on talent does not create sustained perseverance (Duckworth, 2016). Duckworth made this discovery by interviewing spelling bee champions, members of the military, and high-ranking corporate leaders to determine what predicted their success. Fortunately, Duckworth's (2016) research examines four ways that you can grow your 'grittiness'.

Develop a fascination. Surrounding yourself with the intricacies of the topic you want to become gritty about can help you develop a fascination. While the content you are learning might not immediately inspire a fascination, you could focus on understanding yourself as a learner. Discussing your progress, reading relevant articles, and adjusting your social media feed can all help. Keeping questions in the back of your mind is a great way to nurture fascination and grow your GRIT.

Make daily improvements. Competing with others is unhelpful and can cause discouragement. However, competing with yourself is a great way to grow GRIT. Measuring your progress and striving to improve on the person you were yesterday can be done with practical measurements such as time spent studying, clarity of written work, or pages read. Aiming for daily improvements can help cultivate perseverance and move you away from peer competition.

Focussing on a greater purpose. When analysing what drives GRIT, pleasure or purpose, Duckworth (2016) found that purpose is far more powerful. Keeping your overall goal in mind and adjusting your focus towards it helps develop and maintain your GRIT. Rather than saying, "I am writing an assessment" you could say, "I am enhancing my ability to become a caring and observant teacher". This mindset can apply to any action you undertake at university, helping you keep your goals at the forefront of your thinking.

Develop a growth mindset. The value of the growth mindset is discussed in Chapter 2 of this textbook, but the concept of challenging unhelpful thoughts and focussing on the effort and process of learning is an essential aspect of developing GRIT. A growth mindset directly enhances GRIT by fostering resilience in the face of challenges. Adopting a growth mindset can make you more likely to persist through setbacks, seeing the opportunities for growth.

In an interview, Duckworth mentioned additional important elements concerning the development of GRIT. She explained that people with GRIT are not just hardworking and resilient, they truly love and are passionate about what they are doing (Duckworth, 2023). Additionally, gritty people rely on those around them to make sense of their interests and personal development (Duckworth 2023).

By working to build your GRIT in these four ways, you will improve your perseverance when your studies become challenging or require sustained effort. Remember that your effort, fascination, and focus on a greater purpose are allies in your journey through university.

[Learning Activity 11.1 Developing GRIT \[PDF\]](#)

First, choose an area that you would like to develop using the GRIT strategies. For example, you might want to develop your reading comprehension, or your ability to write clearly.

Work to develop a fascination. How can you make this activity more interesting or enjoyable? What is one way to deepen your fascination with this area over the next week? You could follow some social media influencers, or discuss your ideas with others.

Move towards making daily improvements. For example, aim to write or read a small amount each day, recording a reflection on your development. What measure are you going to use to record your progress?

Try to focus on the greater purpose of your goal. Think about how your chosen goal might enhance your ability to engage in university and improve your studies. What long-term goal or purpose motivates you in this area? How can keeping this purpose in mind help you push through challenges?

Develop a growth mindset. How can you reframe the challenges in your area of development as opportunities to grow? What is one mindset shift you can employ this week?

After one week, reflect on your progress. Which strategy helped you the most? How has your perseverance improved? What will you change moving forward?

11.2 The importance of reflecting on your journey

The value of reflection cannot be understated. Reflection is often used to inform important life decisions and make sense of our world. Given that you are likely reading this section towards the end of your first semester of university study, take the time to focus on the achievements you have made over this time. These achievements could include the following:

- Completed all assessment tasks.
- Wrote a longer essay of over 1500 words.
- Improved research skills.
- Read more articles than in the past.
- Improved reading and writing skills.
- Learned how to reference and cite.
- Improved self-discipline.
- Improved time management.

- Learned about yourself as a learner.
- Understand the importance of self-care.
- Developed resilience strategies.
- Sustained perseverance over time.
- Adjusted to a different life ‘rhythm’, with a better balance between home, work, and study.
- Formed meaningful connections with your peers.
- Joined university clubs or societies.
- Learned how to work well in a group work situation.
- Refined your long-term goals.
- Learned how to reflect and think critically.
- Overcame challenges such as coursework, difficult topics, or navigating online systems.
- Managed a sustainable budget.
- Improved confidence.
- Improved self-compassion.
- Worked as part of a group.
- Developed an ability to discuss ideas in a group setting.

This is not a definitive list, but it highlights the variety of achievements you may have enjoyed in your first semester. Reflecting on how you have changed can also be insightful; perhaps you have developed more empathy, questioned some of your values, or simply altered your social media feed. These achievements and changes in thinking are common for new university students. It is important to pause, reflect, and celebrate not only the assessments you have completed but also the personal growth you have experienced.

[Learning Activity 11.2 Reflection \[PDF\]](#)

Write a comprehensive list of the achievements you have made during your university journey so far. You may wish to begin with the list above and add to it.

As an extension of this activity, consider some of the goals you would like to achieve during your time at university and add those as a future to do list.

11.3 Seeking individual supports

An important strategy of perseverance is surrounding yourself with appropriate supports. Unfortunately, many students hesitate to seek help, which prevents them from taking advantage of the support systems and various organisations universities have to offer.

While seeking support from family and community is important, finding specific help that aligns to your individual needs is even more crucial. Universities are known for their variety of clubs and groups that you can join and actively participate in. While it is important to contact the university's access or disability services to discuss adjustments that suit you, student-led groups provide a vital sense of belonging, especially for minority students.

Although universities aim to recognise and accommodate students of minority groups, there is still a lot to be done to address the 'widening participation' or diversity of the student body. Many lecturers are experts in their fields but not necessarily in teaching. It could be argued that lecturers need to spend more time to understand how to cater for the diversity of their student cohort. However, several factors such as workloads and research expectations make this difficult in the university environment. Engaging with teams, clubs, and spaces that foster a sense of belonging can enrich your university experience and give you a platform to advocate for yourself and others. Generally, you will find notice boards on campus or receive correspondence in your student email account about the clubs and groups that exist. Failing that, you can always contact student services or the student senate or guild to explore your options. Perhaps you would like to represent your peers by joining the student senate or guild? Universities offer many avenues to refine your skills, and some of these are outside of the classroom.

Cultivating perseverance, or GRIT, is a worthy daily pursuit. When combined with what you have learned about resilience, reflection, and help-seeking behaviours, you give yourself the best chance of succeeding at university.

As you travel on this journey, take a moment to appreciate the incredible steps that you have taken. Transitioning through university and embracing the challenge is no small feat. This is a brave step into an unknown transformative journey that requires courage, curiosity, and acknowledging your experiences and emotions. Most of all, it involves the act of *re-learning*. Not only do you need to re-learn skills such as reading, writing, and communicating, you also need to re-learn how to be kind to yourself while discovering the learner you always were. It is important that you care for yourself. Self-compassion is a powerful tool that grants you the resilience and courage needed to navigate the challenges that lie ahead. Always celebrate your successes, reward yourself for investing time in your future, and be proud of your progress. Trust that, with time and effort, your abilities will continue to grow and that following your passions will provide a sense of accomplishment. You are capable of remarkable things, and these first steps are a testament to that fact.

11.4 Key strategies from this chapter

- *Develop a fascination*: Engaging deeply with course content will build perseverance.
- *Make daily improvements*: Track small, daily progress to cultivate GRIT.

- *Focus on a greater purpose*: Emphasising the overall purpose behind your tasks and your decision to attend university will maintain motivation.
- *Develop a growth mindset*: Recognise that your abilities and strengths are not fixed. They can grow with effort and reflection.
- *Reflect on your journey*: regular self-reflection allows you to recognise and celebrate personal achievements.
- *Seek support*: By building a network of support around you, you can muster motivation and continue to build your resilience.
- *Cultivate self-compassion*: By recognising the emotional journey of university life and being kind to yourself, you can remain resilient and persevere through university challenges.

11.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have:

- explored how perseverance involves sustained, continuous effort, while resilience focuses on recovering from setbacks. Both are essential for long-term success.
- understood how effort matters more than talent in achieving long-term goals.
- explored how GRIT is developed using four strategies: developing a fascination, making daily improvements, focusing on a greater purpose, and cultivating a growth mindset.
- reflected on how acknowledging personal achievements are crucial for recognising growth and challenges.
- discussed how building a support network is key to perseverance. Student groups and affiliations can create a strong sense of belonging.
- explored how minority students in particular can benefit from university clubs and student-led groups to feel more supported.

11.6 Reflection questions

- In what ways have you demonstrated GRIT or perseverance during your academic journey so far?
- Reflect on a time when resilience helped you overcome a challenge. How did that experience impact your learning?
- What daily practices could you implement to improve your perseverance in the long term? How will you measure these improvements?
- How has your perception of talent vs. effort changed after learning about Angela Duckworth's research on GRIT?
- Which areas of your university experience do you feel require more support? What specific support could help you?
- In what ways has reflection on your academic journey helped you better understand yourself as a learner and an individual?

References

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- Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. Scribner.

I would love to hear your thoughts on this chapter, [share your feedback](#).

DOWNLOADABLE PDFS

Here, you can download pdf versions of all activities throughout the textbook.

[The art of re-learning – all learning activities \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 1.1 Understanding why you are attending university \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 1.2 Redefining success](#)

[Learning Activity 2.1 Self-Reflection and Planning Exercise \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 2.2 Growth Mindset Dice \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 3.1 Self-assessment \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 3.2 Skill inventory exercise \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 4.1 Practicing reading strategy \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 4.2 Practice note-taking using the Cornell Method \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 5.1 Generate, Sort, Connect, Elaborate \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 5.2 Becoming an editor \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 6.1 Emotional reflection \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 6.2 Analysing criteria \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 7.1 Practice searching \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 7.2 Practice citation \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 8.1 Reflecting on your past experiences \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 8.2 Group work roles \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 9.1 Your own emotions wheel \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 9.2 Keeping a diary of emotions \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 10.1 Cultural reflection journal \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 10.2 Visualising two-way learning \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 11.1 Developing GRIT \[PDF\]](#)

[Learning Activity 11.2 Reflection \[PDF\]](#)

VERSIONING HISTORY

This page provides a record of changes made to this textbook. Each set of edits is acknowledged with a 0.01 increase in the version number. The exported files for this toolkit reflect the most recent version.

If you find an error, please contact libinfo@federation.edu.au

Version	Date	Change	Details
1.01	6 March 2025	Book soft published	
1.02	7 March 2025	Book Published	

REVIEW STATEMENT

Resources intended for use at university level must uphold academic integrity. This includes incorporating a mechanism of peer review by experts to ensure open textbooks, such as this one, remain high quality and meet the needs of the students who use them. *The Art of Re-Learning* underwent a formal peer review process, during which established and emerging experts in the field provided critical feedback on the content.

This text was reviewed from late 2024 to January 2025. There are also opportunities for students and staff to provide feedback directly to the author via an [online form](#), or via email at l.frost-camilleri@federation.edu.au. These processes ensure that the content of this textbook remains relevant and up to date.

The formal peer reviewers of this textbook were:

- **Associate Professor Suzi Syme**, the Associate Dean of Education at Southern Cross University and coordinator of the Preparing for Success Program. Suzi has published in internationally peer-reviewed journals and designed a new framework for enabling teaching. She is also involved in the benchmarking project of Australian enabling programs.
- **Dr. Trixie James**, an academic at Central Queensland University, and lecturer in the STEPS enabling program. Passionate about adult learners with specific educational needs, Trixie is an active researcher in enabling education, publishing widely on positive psychology, student belonging, student narratives, and educational empowerment.
- **Dr Sue Mulion**, an academic at Southern Cross University with 20 years of experience working in higher education in Australia. Committed to social justice and educational inclusion, Sue focuses on supporting students from diverse backgrounds, abilities, and learning preferences.

The author would like to thank the reviewers for their insights, time, and contribution to this textbook. The process of peer review is an act of service that ensures resources like this one remain relevant, accurate, and valuable.

Abstract

A brief summary of an article's key points and findings.

Academic Burnout

A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged academic stress and overwork.

Academic Conventions

Accepted practices and standards in academic work, including referencing, citations, expected structure, and formal language.

Academic integrity

Academic Integrity

Acting in accordance with values such as honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility in academic contexts (Exemplary Academic Integrity Project, 2013).

Academic Reading

A focused and critical approach to reading texts, aimed at understanding, evaluating, and engaging with the material for academic purposes.

Academic Writing

A formal style of writing used in academic settings that prioritises clarity, evidence-based arguments, and the use of referencing.

Accidental Plagiarism

Unintentional failure to properly attribute sources due to a lack of understanding or oversight.

Age

(with reference to culture) The range of ages within a population, particularly noting the different perspectives and life experiences brought by older individuals in educational or professional settings.

Aggressor

A group member who is overly critical and assigns blame, causing discomfort among others.

Analytical Skills

The ability to assess, interpret, and draw conclusions from data or information to solve problems or make decisions.

Anxiety Disorder

A mental health condition characterised by excessive and persistent worry, fear, or stress that interferes with daily life.

Assessments

Tasks or activities designed to evaluate a student's knowledge, skills, and understanding of a subject.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

A neurodevelopmental condition characterised by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity that can affect daily functioning.

Attribute/Attribution

Autonomy

Bibliography

Blocker

A person who opposes ideas and hinders group progress.

Body Paragraph

A section of an essay that develops a single idea or argument, supported by evidence and analysis.

Boolean Operators

Words like AND, OR, and NOT used in search queries to refine and combine search terms for more precise results.

Case study

Chairperson

The leader of a team or meeting, responsible for maintaining focus, fairness, and task delegation.

Citations

References to sources used in academic work to acknowledge the ideas of others.

Close Reading

A careful and detailed examination of a text to uncover deeper meanings, themes, and connections. It involves active engagement with the content rather than passive reading.

Collaborative Task

A project or activity requiring input and cooperation from all group members.

Collusion

Unauthorised collaboration on an assignment that is then presented as original individual work (Crook & Nixon, 2018).

Compassion Fatigue

Emotional exhaustion resulting from prolonged compassion, leading to a reduced ability to empathise.

Compliment Sandwich

A feedback technique consisting of positive comments, constructive criticism, and additional positive remarks to encourage acceptance and improvement.

Conciliator

A person who mediates conflicts and promotes fair resolutions.

Conclusion

The closing section of an assessment or article that summarises the main points and reinforces the thesis statement.

Conclusive

Conflict resolution

The process of addressing and resolving disagreements, particularly those that may arise from cultural misunderstandings or differences.

Conflict Resolution

The process of addressing and resolving disagreements constructively to reach an agreement or understanding.

Constructive Feedback

Feedback that offers specific suggestions for improvement while maintaining a supportive tone.

Content Words

Key terms in an assessment that specify the topic or focus areas to be researched or discussed.

Cornell Note-Taking Method

A structured system for organising notes into three sections: cues (questions or keywords), notes (main content), and summary (condensed understanding of the topic).

Course

A structured program of study offered at a university or educational institution.

Criteria

The specific standards or guidelines set by university lecturers or tutors to evaluate the quality, structure, and content of academic work.

Critical Thinking

Involves analysing, examining, and evaluating situations, texts, and beliefs. It challenges you to think deeply about the world and your role within it.

Cross-Marking

The practice of having a second assessor review and evaluate a graded response, typically in cases of failure.

Cultural background

The shared characteristics, beliefs, language, behaviours, and identity of a group. This includes dominant culture and subcultures within a society.

Cultural Competence

The ability to understand, respect, and interact effectively with people from diverse cultures and belief systems.

Cultural competency

The ability to recognise, adapt to, and appreciate cultural differences and similarities. Cultural competency involves self-awareness, understanding others' cultural perspectives, and effective communication across cultural boundaries.

Cultural sensitivity

The awareness that language, slang, and body language can be interpreted differently in diverse cultural contexts. Cultural sensitivity encourages careful and respectful communication.

Dean

Deficit discourses

Refer to the framing of under-represented students as lacking essential academic and social skills.

Detailed Reading

A thorough examination of a text to extract detailed information, typically performed after determining its relevance.

Discipline

An academic field or branch of knowledge studied at university, such as science, teaching, or nursing.

Discrimination

Unfair treatment of individuals based on perceived differences, often tied to stereotypes or prejudice.

Discussion

A section in research articles where the main points and implications of the findings are explored and interpreted.

Diversity

The variety of human characteristics and differences that enrich humanity. These differences may be cultural, biological, or personal and significantly affect people's perceptions of others.

DOI

Dominant culture

The larger societal culture with widespread influence, often perceived as the norm within a given society.

Dominator

A group member who attempts to control the group and decision-making processes.

Eat That Frog

A productivity strategy that encourages prioritising and the completion of the most challenging or important task first.

Eisenhower Matrix

A prioritisation tool dividing tasks into four quadrants: urgent and important, important but not urgent, urgent but not important, and neither urgent nor important. Used to prioritise tasks.

Emotional Intelligence

The ability to recognise, understand, and manage one's own emotions and relationships effectively.

Emotional Regulation

The ability to manage and respond to emotional experiences in a healthy and constructive way.

Emotionality

The capacity to understand and express emotions to strengthen relationships (Copper & Petrides, 2010).

Enabling Education

Educational programs designed to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed for success in higher education.

Energy Management

The strategic regulation of energy to optimise productivity and enhance time management.

Equality

The principle that all group members contribute equally, though it may not always be practical.

Equity

A principle that considers individual differences, skills, and preferences to ensure fairness and effective contribution.

Ethnicity

A cultural distinction based on shared identity, cultural heritage, language, traditions, and behaviours. It often pertains to minority groups within a larger society.

Exposure to Challenges

Facing and engaging with difficult tasks to build skills and resilience.

Feedback

Constructive information provided by university lecturers, tutors, or peers on academic work to help students identify strengths, areas for improvement, and ways to develop their skills and understanding.

Feedback Literacy

The ability to understand, interpret, and use feedback to improve learning and performance.

Findings

The key insights or conclusions derived from analysing the research results.

First-in-family

A student who is the first in their immediate family to attend university or higher education.

Fixed Mindset

A belief that intelligence and abilities are static and unchangeable. This mindset often leads to avoiding challenges, taking criticism harshly, and attributing failures to external factors.

Formative

Gender identity

An individual's internal experience and sense of their gender, which may align with or differ from their birth-assigned sex.

Gender roles

The evolving societal roles of men and women, including shifts in professional, social, and caregiving responsibilities.

General Practitioner

A medical doctor who provides primary healthcare, including diagnosis, treatment, and preventative care.

Generate-Sort-Connect-Elaborate Thinking Routine

An advanced mind-mapping technique developed by Ron Ritchhart that involves generating ideas, sorting them into categories, connecting related ideas, and elaborating on their meanings.

Generative AI

Or "GenAI". Technology capable of producing text, code, music, video, and images based on user prompts.

Geography

(with reference to culture) Differences in ideas, attitudes, and behaviours influenced by the physical location of individuals or groups.

Gold Standard

Grading System

The method used to evaluate and record student performance, typically expressed as grades or marks.

GRIT

A combination of passion and sustained effort towards achieving long-term goals (Duckworth, 2016).

Growth Mindset

A belief that intelligence and abilities can be developed through effort, perseverance, and learning from mistakes. This mindset encourages embracing challenges, welcoming feedback, and striving for improvement.

Help-Seeking Behaviours

Actions taken to seek support or resources when facing challenges or uncertainties.

Higher Education

Another term for university education, referring to post-secondary learning that results in academic degrees, diplomas, or certificates.

Hypothesis

Imposter Syndrome

The feeling that one's success is undeserved and a fear of being exposed as a fraud, despite evidence of competence.

In-text

Inclusive Language

Communication that avoids bias, slang terms or jargon while respecting diversity in terms of gender, culture, and other identities.

Increased Participation

Refers to the growing number of individuals, from diverse backgrounds, enrolling in university.

Independent Learning

A self-directed approach to education where students take responsibility for their learning. Holec (1991) defines it as “the ability to take charge of one's learning”.

Introduction

The opening section of an article or assessment that sets the context, provides background, and introduces the topic.

Issue

Journal/Journal articles

Keywords

Specific words or phrases that represent the main topics or ideas in a text or assessment question, often used in research or searching.

Lecturer

Academic staff responsible for delivering lectures, guiding learning, and assessing students in a university setting.

Likert

Limiting Words

Words that narrow the scope of a topic, such as specific time periods, locations, or groups, or indicate restrictions like word limits or citation requirements.

Literature Review

A section of an article that summarises and discusses existing research relevant to the topic being explored.

Mac

A brand of computers and related products developed by Apple Inc., short for Macintosh.

Meditation

A practice of focused attention or mindfulness to achieve mental clarity and relaxation.

Melatonin

A hormone that regulates the sleep-wake cycle.

Methodology

The part of an article that explains how the research was conducted, including research design, ethics approval, research questions, data collection, and reasoning.

Mind Maps

Visual diagrams that link concepts or ideas, helping to organise information and enhance understanding.

Mind maps

Mindfulness

A mental practice of focusing on the present moment with acceptance and without judgment.

Modelling

Observing others, particularly their successes or struggles, to influence your own perceptions and behaviour.

Multitasking

Attempting to perform multiple tasks simultaneously, often at the cost of efficiency and focus.

Neurodiverse

Refers to individuals whose neurological development and functioning differ from the typical, including conditions such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia.

Neurodiversity

A concept that recognises and celebrates the natural variations in the ways people's brains function, encompassing autism, ADHD, and dyslexia.

Note-taking

The practice of recording key information from lectures, readings, or discussions for study and future reference.

Paraphrasing

Rewriting someone else's ideas in your own words while maintaining the original meaning and providing a citation.

Parentheses

Symbols used in search queries or writing to group terms and clarify relationships between them.

Pedagogy

The method and practice of teaching, including instructional strategies and approaches to learning.

Peer/Peers

Perfectionism

A tendency to strive for flawlessness as a way to control perceptions and avoid feelings of inadequacy. Vulnerability and open discussion can counteract perfectionism.

Perseverance

The ability to persist and remain determined in achieving goals despite difficulties.

Pickle Jar Theory

A prioritisation strategy that categorises tasks as important, less important, or trivial, encouraging a focus on the most critical items first.

Plagiarism

The use of someone else's work or ideas without proper attribution, whether intentionally or accidentally.

Pomodoro Technique

A time management method developed by Francesco Cirillo, using timed work sessions (typically 25 minutes) followed by short breaks to maintain focus and combat procrastination.

Pomodoro technique

Positive Reframing

The process of viewing a situation or feedback in a more positive light, often to empower or motivate growth.

Predicting

In terms of writing, the ability to anticipate content or outcomes in a text based on context clues and prior knowledge.

Prejudice

Negative attitudes or behaviours toward an individual based on stereotypical views of their group.

Previewing

The process of examining headings, subheadings, images, and the structure of a text before reading to predict its content.

Productive Struggle

The process of grappling with challenges and difficulties in learning, fostering deeper understanding and resilience.

Project Manager

Oversees project completion, defines roles, manages timelines, and ensures goals are met in a group setting.

Race

Biological differences often defined by perceptions of skin colour, with significant social implications.

Rapport

A positive and trusting relationship between individuals, often between teachers and students, enhancing communication and learning.

Reader Voice

An inner dialogue that interacts with the text, reflecting on and questioning its content.

Rebel

A group member who refuses to cooperate and behaves against group expectations.

Recommendations

A section where the author(s) highlight research limitations and suggest future research directions or applications.

Record Keeper

Keeps detailed records of meetings, tasks, and communications, compiles work, and manages document access for a group.

Reference

Reflection

A metacognitive skill of thinking deeply about past experiences, identity, and the reasons behind them. It can be personal and often reveals unexpected insights.

Reflection Diary

A personal record used to document thoughts, experiences, and learning processes for self-reflection.

Register

Relationship Management

Building and maintaining positive relationships through leadership, conflict resolution, and connection (Goleman et al., 2002).

Research

The process of systematically investigating academic sources, questions, or topics to establish facts, generate new knowledge, or support arguments in university assessment and studies.

Research database

Resilience

The ability to recover from setbacks, adapt to challenges, and continue working towards goals despite adversity.

Results

The section of a research paper that presents the data or outcomes from the study without interpretation.

Rubric

A tool that outlines the expectations and criteria for assessing tasks, often including detailed descriptions for different performance levels.

Scanning

Searching a text for specific information, such as a keyword or specific detail.

Sceptic

A member who asks critical questions to clarify and refine ideas.

Scholarships

Financial awards provided to students based on academic merit, financial need, or other criteria to support their education.

Search String

A combination of keywords, Boolean operators, and other symbols used to perform targeted searches in databases or search engines.

Self-Awareness

Understanding your own emotional state, including strengths, weaknesses, and self-confidence (Goleman et al., 2002).

Self-Care

Practices aimed at maintaining physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

Self-Control

The ability to regulate desires and impulses (Copper & Petrides, 2010).

Self-efficacy

Self-esteem

How you feel about yourself, including your sense of self-worth and confidence.

Self-Management

Exercising self-control and adapting to emotional challenges with integrity and flexibility (Goleman et al., 2002).

Self-Plagiarism

Reusing one's own previously submitted work, also called "recycling."

Self-Seeker

A group member focused on their own needs or attention rather than group success.

Self-talk

The internal dialogue or thoughts you have with yourself, often while learning or problem-solving.

Seminar

Sexual orientation

A personal characteristic that encompasses the spectrum of human sexuality, including (but not limited to) lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual identities.

Skimming

Quickly glancing through a text to identify its main themes and general ideas.

Sleep hygiene

Sleep Hygiene

Habits and practices that promote consistent and quality sleep.

Sociability

The ability to develop and sustain relationships, focusing on social connections (Copper & Petrides, 2010).

Social Awareness

Recognising and empathising with others' emotions and the emotional dynamics in social contexts (Goleman et al., 2002).

Social Loafer

A group member who contributes little or nothing to group efforts.

Socioeconomic background

The economic and social conditions in which a person grows up, shaping their identity, ideas, and attitudes.

Soft Skills

Personal and interpersonal abilities, such as communication, teamwork, and emotional intelligence, that complement technical knowledge or "hard skills" to enhance academic and professional effectiveness.

Soft skills

Source material

Stereotype

A fixed, simplistic view of a group that often leads to prejudice and discriminatory behaviour.

Stream of Consciousness

A narrative style or writing technique that attempts to capture the continuous flow of thoughts and feelings in the writer's mind.

Synonyms

Words with similar meanings used to vary expression or enhance understanding.

Syntax

Task Batching Technique

A productivity method that involves grouping similar tasks and completing them in one dedicated session.

Task Words

Verbs in assessment instructions that indicate actions students need to perform, such as "analyse," "compare," or "describe."

Thesis Statement

A concise statement in the introduction of an essay or article that summarises the main argument or focus.

Third Place

A space distinct from home (first place) and work/study (second place) where individuals can relax and connect with others, such as cafes, gyms, or community groups.

Timekeeper

A group member who schedules meetings, tracks deadlines, and ensures tasks are completed on time.

Truncation

A searching technique using a shortened version of a word with a symbol (e.g., *) to find all variations of that word.

Tutor

A university staff member or advanced student who provides small-group or individual instruction.

Two-Way Learning

A learning approach where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people share and learn from each other's perspectives (Johnston & Forrest, 2020).

Unit

A specific subject or module within a course that focuses on a particular area of study.

University

An institution of higher education and research that awards academic degrees.

Volume

Waffling

Well-Being

A state of happiness and fulfilment, encompassing a positive outlook on the past, present, and future (Copper & Petrides, 2010).

Word Count

The total number of words in a written academic assessment, often with an acceptable range of 10% above or below the specified limit unless otherwise stated.

Workshop

Writer's Block

A psychological condition where a writer is unable to produce new work or experiences a creative block.

Yarning

A conversational storytelling method that fosters connection, understanding, and knowledge sharing through verbal and non-verbal cues (Terare & Rawsthorne, 2019; Bessarab & Ngandu, 2010).