

TIP SHEET

What makes a successful student?

The future depends on what we do in the present - Gandhi
To climb steep hills requires a slow pace at first - Shakespeare

Everyone will approach university life differently and have different experiences of study and current life responsibilities such as family and work. There are times when it is relatively easy to be a student (before assignments start rolling in!) and times when it is particularly difficult due to general life struggles.

Let's be clear what we mean by "success" here. Whilst there are many measures of success; social, relationship, career etc, for the purposes of this short article, "success" is limited to **academic** success. But remember, university life should be so much more than just engaging with study – thank goodness!

Sometimes life deals out circumstances that make it just too difficult to pursue a university career **at that time**. Sometimes you may feel that you need an extra helping hand to get over a few rough patches. There are characteristics though, that are associated with being a successful university student. These characteristics give us some hints about how to handle the rough patches.

There have been several studies to show that certain factors make success more likely. The factors identified include taking an active attitude towards your studies, identifying challenges early and taking effective action to address them, setting clear and achievable goals and balancing external demands. Other studies have demonstrated that it isn't the number of competing outside demands you have which makes the difference but the way in which you approach those demands. Sometimes life can confront you with multiple demands and it can very helpful to seek counselling.

Habits of the Successful Student:

Attend your lectures, tutorials and labs

There are always times when it becomes difficult to attend classes. You may be sick or having to care for someone who is unwell. Missing the occasional class when you are determined to catch up is understandable. Missing classes to have a coffee will become a problem. Successful students try to attend all of their classes.

Effective time management

Develop a study planner or weekly schedule to map out your classes, study time, and other commitments. You may be surprised by how much time is being spent on activities such as Facebook or in front of the TV! Don't forget to schedule in some time for reviewing notes each week, and preparing for tutorials. A successful student also organises their travel, work hours, babysitting, appointments, and family commitments.

Don't leave things until the last minute

Many students say that they work best under pressure. However the reality is that often the work produced under stressful circumstances is not always of a high quality. Little mistakes may cost you marks and be the difference between a pass and a credit etc. By managing your time and preparing for assignments ahead of time, you may avoid unnecessary stress. Successful students begin preparation for assessment tasks in **Week One**, and work steadily on their goals throughout the semester!!!

Ask questions

Answering questions is one way that lecturers can determine whether they have taught their course properly. You are doing them a favour! You can almost guarantee that there will be someone in the class who will be grateful that you asked that particular question. Challenge yourself and ask one question in your next class.

Keep up with assignments

Playing constant catch-up is no fun. If you think that you are going to need extra time to complete an assignment, keep your lecturer informed about what is going on. If necessary, they will encourage you to apply for an Extension of Time. For more information about applying for extension of time or special consideration for your assignments go to <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/enrolments/progression/special-circumstances.html>

If you are doing an enabling program, special consideration criteria can be found in the ELFS 'Student Survival Booklet' or ask at the ELFS office.



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Take time to be proud

It's easy sometimes to ignore the completion of one assignment because there are more due just around the corner. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge each achievement. Take time to be proud. Each of those completions brings you a step closer to getting your degree.

Set realistic goals

A successful student knows why they are studying. What are your goals for being at university? Develop some realistic short term and long term goals to help you through each semester. The best goals are SMART goals; Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timed; *"I will complete each of my set readings by week 8 of semester"*.

Know your degree requirements

Being clear about your chosen career direction can help you to stay motivated. Some students attend Uni just because they enjoy learning and have no particular career ambitions – and that's fine too. However, having a clear career direction can help to give focus to your studies and assist with goal setting. Consider consulting a University Careers Advisor who can assist you to identify strengths, interests and skills and help you to determine an appropriate academic pathway.

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/careers/index.html>

Use the resources available to you

Complete the Connect 2 Success quiz (<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/connect-2-success/whats-not-working/>) to explore available support options. Successful students access support services to improve their grades and wellbeing. You may also benefit from the 'My Journey' website which offers ideas and tips to help you negotiate life as a student <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/students/my-journey>. Learning Development is an excellent resource and available to all students throughout their time at university - from commencing students to PhD researchers. Learning Development staff work with students on a range of issues to help improve academic success. You may wish to attend workshops or make an individual appointment to discuss an assignment or prepare for an exam. For appointments, workshop registration and an extensive range of academic resources on Blackboard visit the Learning and Development web page.

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/unit/centre-for-teaching-and-learning/learning-development>

Talk to student mentors

Make contact with a student mentor who is doing (or has already done), the same course. They have the experience and may give you some valuable practical advice which relates specifically to that course. Mentors' email addresses are available from this website:

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/mentoring/contacting-a-mentor.html>

Take care of your physical and mental wellbeing

Successful students make the adjustments necessary to achieve a balance in their lives (See 'Work / life balance' tip sheet). You need to ensure that you are caring for your physical and mental health too. Be sure to get sufficient sleep so that your brain can download all of the stuff that you are learning each day! Doing an activity such as meditation or yoga might also help you to focus when you are studying and to manage academic pressures. Exercise and a balanced diet also help with maintaining good mental health. The counselling service runs a free meditation program throughout the semester. You can access information about this program plus meditation exercises on the counselling service website:

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/counselling/meditation.html>

It may seem like a silly suggestion, but learning how to 'be a student' and how to study effectively is half the battle. Jump online and discover your learning style. This will help you to identify study methods that are going to be most beneficial for you. There are many sites that you can try such as:

<http://www.courseworks.unimelb.edu.au/scholarlylife/learningstyles.php>

Adapted from: Anderson, (2009). Educational and Planning Resources: Characteristics of a Successful Student. Washington: Peninsula College.

Other resources

Websites

http://www.adelaide.edu.au/counselling_centre/resources/brochures/lifestyle.html

http://www.swinburne.edu.au/stuserv/counselling/swin_ecounselling/resources/student.htm