



TIPS FOR FIRST YEARS

HOW TO GET OFF TO A
GOOD START

IN

THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND
COMMERCE

2nd Edition

Teaching and Learning Unit, Faculty of Economics and Commerce
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THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

1. BEGINNING UNIVERSITY

Studying at university is interesting, exciting and challenging, both intellectually and socially. You will be introduced to new ideas and new ways of thinking. You will be expected to work hard but will also have the opportunity to meet new friends and enjoy an active social life. You may be working to support yourself or living away from home for the first time. You may have come to Australia from overseas to study. To balance all the demands on you, it is necessary to understand what is expected of you and to be able to organise your time.

1.1 Expectations

As a tertiary student you will need to be able to study both independently and in groups.

You are expected to:

- Think about your own learning and to work out what is effective for you. The way you learn may be very different from the way your friends approach their study.
- Organise your time so that you can study effectively as well as enjoy you're the social life at university.
- Work out what is important and organise you study in accordance.
- Do the reading that is required of you before you go to class.
- Work independently on written assignments.
- Think critically, which means to question, to evaluate and to see other perspectives
- Think for yourself rather than memorise. This means understanding, thinking about the ways in which a new idea relates to things you already know, making connections between ideas, applying concepts to the real world, asking questions.
- Discuss ideas with others, both in tutorials and more informally out of class
- Work constructively with others in a group.



This means that you will actively engage with the material and think in a conceptual and connected way rather than using unrelated detail (Biggs, 1999: 16).

1.2 Helpful Hints

Here are some tips to help you as you begin your study in the Faculty of Economics and Commerce.

- Ask questions – of your reading, friends, study groups, staff from the Teaching



and Learning Unit.

- Seek advice as often as you need to. You should talk to your tutor, the Teaching and Learning Unit in the faculty of Economics and Commerce, the faculty course advisor, the ESL Centre, the Learning Skills unit, the counselling service. There are many people at the university to help you, whether your problem is small or large.
- Seek advice as early as possible. It is much better to take action before the problem becomes too great and before you have become behind in your work.
- Although you will have to think independently, you are not expected to work alone. In some of your tutorials you will discuss the concepts you are studying with fellow students. Study groups also are a form of collaborative learning in which you are able to discuss your work and ideas with others. In doing so you will develop a deeper and more critical approach to your learning. Find students you can work well with. The Teaching and Learning Unit sets up study groups for the larger subjects at the beginning of each semester and again around exam time.



Peer interaction leads to valuable learning outcomes such as more complex knowledge, greater awareness of learning patterns, reflection, understanding and improved social skills (Biggs, 1999:109)

- Think of your studies as developing skills as well as learning information.

You are learning:

To read critically and effectively.
To write clearly, logically and fluently.
To discuss ideas both orally and in writing.
To think deeply.
To use electronic technologies.

In other words, you are not only learning facts and ideas, you are learning to be a good communicator, which is considered to be a very valuable skill in the workforce.

Think of your tutors and lecturers as coaches who can guide you in the intellectual skills you will need in Accounting, Finance, Management or Economics.

2. STARTING TO STUDY ECONOMICS

In every subject it is important that you have completed the reading and preparation for the tutorials. The tasks that will be given in the tutorial are based on this reading and you will find it difficult to understand the tasks if you come to tutorials unprepared.

2.1 Tutorials in Microeconomics

The tasks you will be given in these tutorials are problem-solving tasks. It is assumed that you have the basic knowledge and understand the key concepts from the week's reading and preparation exercise. In the tutorial you will have the opportunity to think about these concepts in relation to problems set. These are often based on real life situations. In the tutorial you will work in groups to solve the problems. You will not have seen these problems before, although they are similar to the ones given in the preparation and reading guide that you are given each week.

Reading guide (blue sheet)

When you receive the reading guide, it will include

- A reference in the text to read
- Key concepts
- Simple questions from the reading to guide your notetaking
- Sample problems

Tutorial tasks (pink sheet)

This will be given to you in the tutorial and will have a set of problems that will be done in small groups (of about four students). The problems will be based on the reading and preparation done from the blue sheet.

Tutorial 1

The tasks this week are based on the concept of opportunity cost.

Before the tutorial:

- Complete the reading and take notes.
- Complete the review questions as you read.
- Attempt the problem on the reading guide. This forms the basis of the work in the tutorial.
- Re-read the section in your textbook on opportunity cost.

In the tutorial:

- Read the new problems distributed in the tutorial.
- Discuss them with others in your group.
- If some members of your group do not understand either the problem or the solution, try to explain. Putting what you understand into words helps you to crystallise your ideas in your mind.
- Appoint a spokesperson to report back to the whole tutorial, but do not expect them to do all the work. They report on behalf of the group and all members are expected to have contributed. Your tutor may decide who is to report back

- Communicate effectively. The task your group will be given involves you in explaining clearly to others. You will also need to learn to listen carefully to others' explanations in order to arrive at a correct approach or solution. The purpose of the tasks to discuss and work together.

2.2 Reading in Microeconomics

Example taken from *Principles of Microeconomics*, (Mankiw et al, 1999)

Here is one way to approach your reading. This is a good way to begin as it will focus you on the important points in the text. As you become more confident you will develop your own ways of reading effectively.

- Read the objectives for the first chapter of the textbook, which are in the left-hand column, on the first page of each chapter.
- Convert the first five objectives of this chapter into questions. This will help you with note taking and revising later on. For example:
 - What are the trade-offs that people face?
 - What is opportunity cost?
 - How is the concept of marginal utility used in making decisions?
 - How do incentives affect people's behaviour?

Focusing your reading

- Think about the questions before you read.
- Write down the key terms.
- Read the chapter summary first before you read the chapter to focus your reading on the most significant concepts.
- Read the chapter. As you do, answer the questions you devised earlier.
- Answer the review questions contained in the reading guide.
- Write definitions for the key terms.



Orr, F. 1997

3. STARTING TO STUDY ACCOUNTING

Accounting is a sequential subject so it is important to keep up to date with your reading and problem solving. Here is a guide for working through the learning objectives that are in the study guide to accompany the textbook *Principles of Accounting*. The learning objectives provide the focus for each chapter. If you work through the reading in a systematic and directed manner you will understand the lectures better and be able to tackle the problems which are covered in tutorials.

Read and review the Learning Objectives (in the Study Guide) one by one.	These objectives are at the front of each chapter of the textbook <i>Principles of Accounting</i> . By reading these you will know what is expected of you each week
Read the summary statement for the learning objective.	You will find the summary statement following the lecture outline in The Study Notes that accompany <i>Principles of Accounting</i> . The summaries give an overview and so focus your reading.
Read the lecture outline for the learning objective.	The outline is in the Study Notes. Read the outline before the lecture as this will prepare you for the lecture.
Read the chapter in the textbook and any other materials needed for the tutorial.	If you have done the suggested preparation, you will find it easier to read the whole chapter.
Write down any key terms or concepts.	Check your definitions with those in the text under 'Review of Concepts and Terminology', found right after the Chapter Review located at the end of each chapter.
Read the review of the learning objectives at the end of the chapter in the text <i>Principles of Accounting</i> .	Look at the self-help review exercises and problems in the text, the Study Notes and the Study Guide.
Attend all of the lectures.	They will give you a different perspective on a new topic to that presented in the text.
Be prepared for and attend all of the tutorials.	Tutorials give you new insights into the topics and allow you to interact with your tutor and fellow students. This kind of participation will greatly enhance your university learning experience.

If you work through each Learning Objective in this way and keep written answers to questions and problems, as well as a list of key definitions, you will find it much easier to study at the end of the semester because you will have built up a comprehensive set of notes.

Hints from John Pifko, Lecturer in Accounting 1A, on how to succeed at university:

1. Make friends, both in your classes (in case you ever need to borrow notes, to ask questions, etc.) as well as in other disciplines (to round out your Uni experience).
2. Go to lectures. No one is going to force you to go so you have to force yourself.

3. Speak up in tutorials. It's the only way you're going to learn and chances are, if you have a question, 90% of the rest of the students have the same question (but they're also too afraid to speak up - be the hero!).
4. Pace yourself. Plan ahead, put important dates in your day-planner and allow yourself LOTS of time to get assignments, papers, etc. completed. People tend to underestimate how long it will take to get something done. It's far better to get your work finished early (and relax the last few days before the deadline) than to be late.
5. Learn how to use the library and the computer labs EARLY (before they're swamped with all the people who ignored step 4).
6. Join a club or intermural sports team. Round out your educational experience.
7. Ask questions. No one will think you're stupid for asking a question. Quite the contrary, you will give the impression that you're actually learning something. It takes effort to come up with a well-thought-out question.
8. Take time to sleep and eat well. If you allow yourself to get run down, no amount of study will do you any good.
9. Be scrupulous about footnotes. If you think that the marker is not going to check footnotes, you are wrong.
10. Have fun! These are the best years of your life.

4. MOTIVATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

Motivation and time management are both very personal things. Different people are studying for very different reasons, have different expectations of themselves, organise their time differently and work in very different ways.



Some ideas that may help you to be more productive.

- Keep on top of the reading and tutorial preparation. Nothing is more demoralising than the feeling that you will never catch up.
- Go to lectures and tutorials. It is difficult to persuade yourself to do some work if you are out of touch and don't really know what is going on.
- Keep a list of things to be done each week.
- Mark all the due dates of assignments in your diary so that you know when the difficult times in the semester will be and can plan ahead.
- Break work up into manageable tasks; eg define key terms for chapter 8, go through lecture notes, prepare tutorial questions.
- Do some work every day (even if it is only ½ or one hour)
- Make sure you have a place where you can work effectively, eg the Giblin,
- Think about the times of the day when you work best and use them for the more demanding tasks
- When you are about to finish, make a note of what you want to do next so that you know where to start when you come back to work next day.
- Reward yourself for time spent working constructively.
- Plan breaks.
- Plan social time and study time.
- Work with a friend or join a study group.
- Get some sleep.

Take a break:

Most students find that they cannot concentrate effectively for more than about one hour. After that time have a short break - a cup of tea, sort out your papers, tidy the desk, check the letterbox. Then go back to work. After a certain substantial task has been completed, have a longer break to make a phone call, read the paper, cook dinner etc. Some students work better if they feel they have deadlines - even ones set by themselves. If you are one of these people, set a time limit to complete a task.

5. HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR ACADEMIC LIFE

Studying at university may not always be easy. At times the workload can seem overwhelming, you may have difficulties with motivation, time planning, working alone. However there is no need to struggle on by yourself. The Teaching and Learning Unit (TLU) offers a range of services to enhance your learning and assist you with improving your approach to learning. We offer individual consultations, TLU study groups, ESL workshops, lectures, email consultations, a PASS program in some subjects and a website.

5.1 Teaching and Learning Unit Services for Students

Learning Skills

- Learning skills individual consultations. These are designed to assist you with:
 - a. Time management - if you are having difficulty organising your time effectively we can assist you to devise study timetables which will help you to plan your study time.
 - b. Motivation - if during the semester, you feel that you are losing direction we can assist in putting you back on a productive path.
 - c. Reading skills - we can assist you to read efficiently for your subjects, so that you can get the most from the texts without wasting enormous amounts of time. We can also help you to make connections between ideas and integrate what you read with the lecture and tutorial program.
 - d. Writing skills - we can help you analyse set tasks, to understand what is required of you in this faculty. We can then give you help with planning your writing, structuring and organising your ideas, connecting ideas together in a logical and cohesive manner, citing source material, drafting and editing. You can bring your writing to the Teaching and Learning Unit at any stage in the process - pre-planning, planning, drafting or final stage.
 - e. Exam preparation - assistance with organising your time and preparing effectively for the exams in this faculty.
- Subject specific study groups run by students - these are small groups of students from the same subject who get together to study collaboratively and so enhance both their knowledge of the subject matter and communication and team work skills.
- Learning Skills lectures - throughout the year there will be a series of lectures to assist you with subject specific learning skills and approaches to assessment tasks.
- Basic maths consultations
- Email assistance - if you have a question that you wish to ask or if you wish to send some writing in to the Teaching and Learning unit for comment, you can email Anna Jones on: annalj@unimelb.edu.au
- Booklets - learning skills booklets and pamphlets for this faculty, produced by the Teaching and Learning Unit are available on the second floor of the Economics and Commerce Building.

- Online tutor for ESL and Learning Skills questions
- Web site - there is information on the web site at:
<http://www.tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/>
At this site you will find information to assist you with the learning skills that you will need to study in this faculty.

English as a Second Language

- Individual ESL consultations - to provide assistance with effective reading, understanding questions, planning, structuring and organising ideas, drafting, citing. The individual consultations also provide you with an opportunity to learn to express your ideas in clear and coherent English. Bring your writing to the unit at any stage of the process - before you start planning, at the initial writing stage or when you have a completed draft.
- Reading and writing workshops to develop language skills - these workshops are designed to develop the skills of effective note taking, reading, writing paragraphs, organising ideas as well as writing introductions and conclusions. Help with vocabulary and grammar for students whose first language is not English is also available. Workshops are developed to assist you with your language for the subjects in this faculty.
- Study groups - groups of students whose first language is not English who wish to study together to improve both their English and their understanding of the subject material.
- Lectures - throughout the year there is a series of lectures designed to assist you with specific skills for the subjects you will be studying.

Enjoy your time at university!



References

Biggs, J. (1999). *Teaching for quality learning at university*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Mankiw, N.G., Gans, J., & King, S. (1999). *The principles of microeconomics*, Sydney: Harcourt Brace.

Orr, F. (1997). *How to Pass Exams*, St Leonards, Australia: Allen and Unwin

Wise, T., Needles, B., Anderson, H., & Caldwell, J. (1998). *Principles of accounting*, Brisbane, Australia: Jacaranda Wiley.



If you would like more help, please contact the Teaching and Learning Unit at the Faculty of Economics and Commerce. You can do this via the website, www.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/tluwww/, or through the faculty office.

The TLU has developed a series of booklets like this one to support you in your Economics and Commerce course. They are:

- Learning to learn
- Getting the most out of lectures
- Getting the most out of tutorials
- Effective reading strategies
- Good writing
- Doing well in exams
- Tips for first years
- Concept mapping
- Basic referencing using the APA system
- Intercultural Communication