



Preparing for University

A mature students' guide (Postgraduate)

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Deciding to apply for a university course and studying as a mature student needs thought and planning. It is important to prepare yourself as much as you can, prior to starting university, as this can make the difference between enjoying the experience or feeling overwhelmed. This guide covers some of the issues and problems that current students have identified as being relevant to them at the start of university. It also outlines sources of help and support that are available to students.

Currently, at Manchester Metropolitan University, over 40 percent of full time undergraduate students are 21 or over when they join. Students over 21 years of age are considered 'mature'; as this suggests 'mature' incorporates not only students from a variety of different age groups, but those with many different life experiences. Therefore writing a definitive guide for mature students is difficult as what is relevant to one student may not be so for another. But it is hoped that this guide will be of assistance to you in preparing for university life.

Building confidence to learn.

Recognising and overcoming anxieties.

The thought of starting university may make you feel both excited and anxious. Inevitably it will bring change and new challenges. You may find it easier to handle new situations, challenges and be able to manage your anxieties if you explore what they are and how you might cope with them. Over the page there is a list of common anxieties students' experience, tick any that apply to you and add any others you can think of.

Study and learning	Personal, family, work and financial commitments
<input type="checkbox"/> Keeping up with other people	<input type="checkbox"/> Making friends with other students
<input type="checkbox"/> Finding the time to do everything	<input type="checkbox"/> Coping with travel
<input type="checkbox"/> Understanding academic language	<input type="checkbox"/> Organising childcare
<input type="checkbox"/> Having the confidence to speak	<input type="checkbox"/> Family commitments
<input type="checkbox"/> Having the confidence to write	<input type="checkbox"/> Managing work and study
<input type="checkbox"/> Writing essays	<input type="checkbox"/> Coping on a low income
<input type="checkbox"/> Getting used to university life	<input type="checkbox"/> Being an older student
<input type="checkbox"/> Meeting deadlines	<input type="checkbox"/> Time table and organising other tasks
<input type="checkbox"/> Coping with computing / IT	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(Adapted from Cottrell, S (1999) *The Study Skills Handbook*)

- Look at any anxieties you have identified and highlight which you feel will be the most problematic.
- How could you deal with any of these anxieties?
- How have you coped in the past? Can you use any of these strategies now?
- What can you do to prepare yourself before you start at university to reduce anxiety?

Here are some suggestions

Study Skills

- Develop and enhance your study skills. There are many excellent books available which give practical advice and guidance, these include -
Cottrell, S (2000) *The Study Skills Handbook*, Basingstoke; Palgrave Macmillan.
Race, P (1992) *500 Tips for Students*, Oxford; Blackwell.
Marshall, L and Rowland, F (1998) *A Guide to Learning Independently*, Buckingham; Open University Press.
- Once you start at MMU book an appointment with a member of the Learning Support Unit on 0161 247 3491 for specific study skills support.
- Try to develop your IT skills before you start university. Generally assignments will need to be 'word processed' on a computer, therefore if you do not know how to do this enrol on a beginners' course or familiarise yourself with word processing in some other way.
- Find a suitable place to study, perhaps by re-organising furniture to ensure you have a comfortable space with few distractions.
- Set aside time for studying. Make a timetable which includes both academic, employment and personal commitments. Incorporate assignment deadlines once these are known.

Identifying current skills and qualities to boost confidence.

As a mature student you probably already have a range of skills which you have developed over the course of your life. These may have been acquired, for example, through previous employment, voluntary work, raising children or running a household. The current skills and qualities you already possess will benefit you at university. From the list below tick the ones which you already have.

<input type="checkbox"/> Ability to get on with people from different backgrounds	<input type="checkbox"/> Organising work to meet deadlines
<input type="checkbox"/> Ability to see and understand other peoples point of view	<input type="checkbox"/> Willingness to take risks and experiment
<input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with the general public	<input type="checkbox"/> Word processing
<input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork	<input type="checkbox"/> Problem solving
<input type="checkbox"/> Managing other people	<input type="checkbox"/> Practical thinking
<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching and training others	<input type="checkbox"/> Writing reports or official letters
<input type="checkbox"/> Caring for others	<input type="checkbox"/> Ability to learn from mistakes
<input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with others by phone	<input type="checkbox"/> Stress management
<input type="checkbox"/> Courage to speak out against injustice	<input type="checkbox"/> Staying calm in a crisis
<input type="checkbox"/> Making decisions	<input type="checkbox"/> Determination and perseverance
<input type="checkbox"/> Setting priorities	<input type="checkbox"/> Maintaining motivation
<input type="checkbox"/> Classifying and organising information	<input type="checkbox"/> Trusting own abilities

(Adapted from Cottrell, S (1999) The Study Skills Handbook)

All the skills and attributes listed above can help you with your academic studies and more generally cope with the demands of university life.

Support Services for students

- Within MMU a number of support services are available to students. When you start university you will receive a booklet which contains the services which are available to you. Remember these services exist to support you, so please seek assistance if you feel you need it.
- Childcare – Dryden Street Nursery is situated near to MMU campus buildings on the Oxford Rd, Manchester. For further information please contact the nursery directly on 0161 272 7121. The Children’s Information Service also gives information about childcare providers in the Manchester area. They can be contacted on 0161 234 7111 or see www.childcarelink.gov.uk . At MMU Cheshire a list of childcare providers is available from the Reception, in the Northfields Building, Alsager Campus, Hassall Rd, Alsager, Cheshire, ST7 2HL, or telephone 0161 247 5326.

