

Guide to Studying at Home

This study guide will help you get the most out of your study time, with advice on everything from planning your work to avoiding last-minute panics. You'll also find out what it's like studying with us, with tips from the experts at the Open College of the Arts, one of the UK's top distance learning centres for the Arts.

When you get your teaching materials you might find that you are assessed less often but in more depth and you'll be left to your own devices a lot more.

Assessment methods

The main methods of assessment are outlined below and will be slightly different depending on what course you do. For example, a creative writing course would include mostly written assignments and reflection while a painting or photography course would include mostly practical projects and assignments.

Projects

Projects are completed at regular intervals throughout the course. The advantage of projects is that they break learning into small manageable pieces and give you a chance to evaluate your own improvement along the way.

Assignments

Assignments are usually in the format of a more substantial set of tasks that allow you to bring together what you have learned from the projects. The teaching materials clearly tell you when you need to produce the assignment. The completed assignment gives your personal tutor an idea about what you have learned so far so that they can advise you about

your progress.

Written Assignments

Written assignments could be in the form of essays, reports, reflective notes, logbooks, evaluations or, at Level 3 (HE6), a 5,000 word critical review. Writing assignments helps you to focus your learning and usually requires a certain amount of personal research. You will also learn new skills, such as accurate academic referencing, which will refine your writing.

Written tutor feedback

OCA has an excellent system of distance learning feedback. You will receive positive, constructive comments from your personal tutor that support your learning and progress on the course.

Peer and Self-Assessment

Occasionally, students may wish to assess each other or even themselves - this is possible through the OCA website's gallery. The idea is that you can learn a lot from assessing your own and others' work.

Managing your time

Most people who have problems with managing their time fall into one of the following categories:
Having too much to do in too little time.
Having lots of time, but not getting a lot done.

Whether you've got weeks to go or you've left everything until the last minute, the most important thing to remember is to make the best of the time you have, if you find it hard to get down to work at all, you'll need to find ways to motivate yourself.

0800 731 2116

www.oaca-uk.com



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Tops tips

Motivation

- Set daily goals
- Make a list of what you want to achieve, and make sure it's realistic.

Break down tasks

Studying successfully in one long session is never going to happen. Huge chunks of work can be daunting, so study briefly and regularly, dividing your work into small chunks.

Ease yourself in

Tackle small tasks first and progress to more demanding ones as the teaching materials suggest.

Listen to your body clock

If you're an early bird, work when you get up and are feeling fresh. If mornings aren't your thing, set aside time in the afternoon or evening instead.

Make a timetable

Plan what you're going to do and when. You'll find advice on making timetables later on in this guide.

Take time out

Working 24/7 without a break would drive even the most conscientious of students to distraction. When your brain can't take anymore, take a break, go and watch the television, see your friends or grab a sandwich.

Learn more by doing

Just passively reading the teaching materials is not the best way to work - you need to take an active approach and do the practical projects as directed. Making useful notes in your logbook and carefully doing the practical work will help you to progress.

Plan your study time

Most of us start studying with grand plans and a tough timetable. Although this might seem a good idea, it can be demotivating too. If you set yourself

unrealistic expectations, you'll end up falling behind and wanting to just pack it all in. Following the guidelines below will help you make a schedule you'll stick to.

Start early

If you've got plenty of time, use it! Devise your study time to start early enough so there'll be no last-minute panics if something unexpected comes up.

Think outside study

You might have to cut down on the time you spend socialising, but don't put your life on hold until the course is over. Plan your study around the other things in your diary (sport, family commitments etc).

Extra time

Include blank time - sometimes you need to spend extra time on something that is harder than what you've already learnt, or to catch up on something if you've fallen behind.

Take a break

As we said before, make sure you take time out for a snack or drink or chat with friends. Taking on too much will leave you stressed out and fed up.

Be flexible

If you find that your study timetable isn't working because you've made it too easy or hard for yourself, change it.

More help

If you feel you need to improve your study skills, help with completing assignments or writing critical reviews (Level 2/HE5, Level 3/HE6) then contact your tutor, they are there to help you. You can also get support from other students who might have completed or are also doing the same course as you. Go to www.oqa-uk.com for details.