

# Study Guide For Undergraduates

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#### Introduction

This guide is intended to introduce you to how to get the most from your teaching while at Oxford. We have tried to answer the questions that are likely to arise in the first few weeks of your time at New College. It is not intended to be a definitive set of rules because every student has their own approach to work and knows how they study to best effect. Part of the challenge of moving to University is learning how to manage your time to fit the demands of your course. You will find that different courses have different work patterns, in terms of both the kind of work and how many hours of formal teaching/practicals you receive and spend in personal study.

Teaching at Oxford is very different compared with that offered at most universities in the UK, with the tutorial at the centre of all undergraduate courses. You will meet your College Tutors within your first few days at New College. Some subjects have one College Tutor whereas others, particularly the joint schools, will have several. Your College Tutor may be either a Fellow of the College or a College lecturer: either way, it will be someone who has expertise in a specific area. During your time at Oxford you should also expect to be taught by Fellows and Lecturers at other Colleges, and others, when they have specialist expertise in areas which your College Tutor(s) do not.

#### This guide will: -

Explain the teaching system and its requirements;

Suggest ways to manage your work effectively;

Provide information on sources of feedback;

#### Teaching at Oxford

Each course at Oxford places a different emphasis on lectures, seminars, classes, practicals and individual teaching. Your Department or Faculty will run introductory sessions in the first few weeks of term to explain the emphasis within your subject. This may be in large classes or in individual sessions with your tutor.

The tutorial is central to teaching at Oxford. It normally involves a tutor and two undergraduates (or occasionally one, or three undergraduates) and you will normally have at least one tutorial a week for the eight weeks of Full Term, each lasting about one hour. This will require you to prepare work either to submit in advance or to take to the tutorial. At the tutorial you will discuss the work you have done for the tutorial (e.g. an essay or problem sheet) and its wider implications with both you and the other student(s) present (your tutorial partner(s)).

While organising tutorials is a College responsibility, lectures and seminars are organised by Departments and Faculties. These are given by Oxford academics and sometimes respected guests from other institutions. The lecturer will be an expert in the subject and will have researched in that area, collating even the most recent information and presenting it coherently. The lecturers will be able to provide you with an analysis of the subject matter enabling you to understand the breadth of your subject, thus allowing more informed specialisation in later years. It is also useful to hear information delivered in different ways, particularly if the lecturer is renowned within their field or beyond.

Many subjects use small group teaching where you get more individual attention from lecturers than in a formal lecture, but less than in a tutorial. In these classes you will benefit from the exchange of ideas with other students. In the Sciences, you are likely to have practical classes each week. These are essential to help you develop your knowledge of the

and often there is a requirement for you to complete a minimum number of practicals in order to pass your University exams. Some subjects also use field trips and excursions to reinforce teaching and show you the resources available within the University and further afield.

What happens in a tutorial?

Your tutorials will be organised by your New College Tutor, with the first being arranged when you meet for the first time in 0<sup>th</sup> Week. This will usually take place in the T soffice or study in College, but it may take place in their office in their D

#### Obtaining books

- 1. Plan your work sensibly in the light of library opening hours, which can be found at: http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/subjects-and-libraries/opening-hours.
  - In particular, do not count on being able to read works at the last minute: they may be on loan to someone else, or otherwise unavailable. If an important work is unobtainable, ask your Tutor for advice or speak to your College Librarians, who may be able to source it for you.
- 2. When you go to the library, do not necessarily be tempted to pick up the first book on your reading list and take it back to your room. Take a moment to find your way through the text use the contents pages and index to find relevant passages, you are not expected to read every page of a text! Your Tutor will be able to suggest some key texts that are worth buying.
- 3. -hand; but make sure you are buying the latest edition of a text when this matters.

Reading and note-taking

Rather than just deciding to begin at the beginning, it is worth thinking about how to approach reading a book.

- Begin reading by browsing or surveying the book. Study the table of contents and index to see how the ideas in the book are structured. From chapter headings and subheadings, you may be able to note those sections that are most relevant for your purposes.
- 2. Check the publication date. This may alert you to the position of the book either in relation to recent ideas, current data or particular subject paradigms.
- 3. Read the abstract, foreword, preface and introduction, as these tend to contain the structure of the book and a summary of the main themes.
- 4. The body of the text will contain, in carefully arranged chapters, all the relevant material to support the themes and ideas.
- 5. Conclusions provide a summary of the main ideas and may point to a different
- 6. An index is locatted at 0148 (tracks of southernotes of so the of so the of so e4()-29(a(o)6(th)

they were taken from. Use sub-headings, coloured ink or highlighting to make your notes easier to navigate.

Try to avoid overlong notes; you should be creating a précis of the ideas. This will also help you to avoid unintended plagiarism (\_\_\_\_\_\_, below). Always note down the \_\_\_\_\_, below).

Discussions with your fellow students over the week can also be a very valuable way to learn and can help develop your understanding and arguments.

### Writing your essay

Once you have thought about your essay title and collated the notes from your reading you will be ready to start. Everyone takes a different amount of time to write an essay; but, as a

- leave enough space around the text to allow your Tutor to add comments if they take the work in for marking. A T
- 5. You are likely to use a computer, but legible handwriting is also fine. Remember that you will have to write your answers by hand for your examinations<sup>1</sup>, so it can be good practic

# Solving a set of problems

Everyone takes a different amount of time to solve a set of problems; but, as a guide, you should allow at least 8-10 hours for the process. If it is a topic that you find particularly difficult, it would be wise to allow longer. The type of problem set will vary considerably. You may be presented with a set of maths problems, reaction equations, or questions which will need a written paragraph to answer them. If you are unsure on how they need to be answered, ask your Tutor for advice.

Here are some general guidelines that apply to all subjects:

1. Read the problems thoroughly. This should be done as soon as possible after they arqa(i4(t)

# Citing references

There is no exaggeration in saying that every subject cites references in different ways. Individual journals within a very specialist field will also vary enormously from numbered lists to alphabetical list, with different permutations of bold and italic type. Footnotes are used extensively in some subjects but are never used in others. You should ask your Tutor for guidance on this issue, and check the guidance in your Course Handbook, as there are too many different styles to enumerate here. However, when you need to refer to a text, you should include the following information:

1.

#### Getting the most from a tutorial

The main aim of tutorials is to provide a forum for the discussion of ideas. A tutorial may begin with the Tutor explaining some of the more difficult concepts and placing them into the context of the discipline; but this should develop into a two-way exchange of ideas, resulting in the student coming to a new understanding of the subject matter. This may seem like a daunting prospect at first, and some of your early tutorials will almost certainly involve your Tutor helping you bridge the gaps between your school experience and your university course. However, as you begin to take in new concepts and ideas you should be able to engage in debate with your Tutor and tutorial partner.

Use the opportunities presented by the tutorial to increase your in-depth understanding of the subject. Question your Tutor until you understand each concept in full. Make sure you take good notes, but do not spend the whole tutorial writing. It may be more productive to write down general headings in the tutorial and add in full notes immediately afterwards while the ideas are fresh in your mind: this will help you to develop your critical understanding of the topic in a constructive way.

Another aim of the tutorial is to improve your written work by developing the organisation of your ideas and concepts, and strengthening the force of your arguments. Your Tutor will be able to suggest ways to improve your work and, through the tutorial itself, provide you with a framework for your studies. You can also learn from your fellow students when reading essays, debating points, or working through a problem on the board. By observing their techniques you can incorporate the most successful into your own repertoire.

Here are some good general rules for getting the most from your tutorials:

- 1. Always prepare the work you have been asked for. Additional work may help you to gain different perspectives, but it can also be counterproductive if it is untargeted.
- 2. Always hand in the work on time.
- 3. If you have any difficulties with the work, contact the Tutor in advance. Hand in your work with an explanatory note if necessary.
- 4. Always arrive for the tutorial in good time.
- 5. If you have a problem in attending the tutorial, let your Tutor know well in advance. Tutors will try and adjust meetings to accommodate illness or other similar difficulties, but they have busy schedules and cannot alter arrangements merely for your convenience.
- 6. Always actively participate in the tutorial. Remember to take a pen and paper. You will not gain the full benefit of your T a personal

#### Managing your workload

Effective time management is one of the most important skills to develop during your time at Oxford. University is not like school, where your time was well structured by your teachers. Here, you need to devise your own timetable. In order to succeed at Oxford you will need to be hard-working and well-organised. These are extremely valuable skills to employers and will also help you to cope with the challenges involved in your later working life.

When you first arrive it can be daunting to see the number of lectures, tutorials, seminars, classes, and practicals that you need to attend. You need to remember to allow yourself thinking time so that you can digest the information you are being given and make a note of questions you would like to ask your Tutor. Of course, it is also important to allow yourself time to relax and enjoy the opportunities presented by life as a student in Oxford. But how can you balance these demands?

#### A few tips

☑ Buy a diary/personal organiser and notepad. Enter all of your academic commitments

Remember that amidst the social, sporting, and other College and University attractions, your first and over-riding responsibility is your academic work, and you should expect this to take

## Feedback on performance

Feedback from your Tutors is one of the most effective ways to develop your study skills whilst at Oxford. Most of the feedback on your work will be given orally during tutorials, and some will appear as marks or corrections annotated on your submitted work. Your Tutor may not give precise grades for each essay or set of problems; constructive criticism and advice is more helpful than placing you in a league table. If you would like more detailed feedback during term, ask your Tutor. Each person who has taught you during term will write an end-of-term report on your performance, which your College Tutor will normally discuss with you at a meeting at the end of each term, and which later on will be available to you

Your progress will also be monitored through two kinds of # .

1. "Collections" are practice examinations that are set at the start of term. In 0<sup>th</sup> Week, Tutors regularly set examinations which are designed to test either or both of: (a) work done in the previous term, and (b) vacation work done to prepare for the term ahead. At the end of term, your Tutors will give you notice of what sort of Collections you will

without full acknowledgement. All published and unpublished material, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form, is covered under this definition.

Collusion is another form of plagiarism involving the unauthorised collaboration of students (or others) in a piece of work.

Cases of suspected plagiarism in assessed work are investigated under the disciplinary regulations concerning conduct in examinations (if plagiarism is detected in University exams)

(if plagiarism was committed as part of your termly college work). Intentional or reckless plagiarism may incur severe penalties, including failure of your degree or expulsion from the University and College.

Plagiarism is not tolerated either within College or the University as a whole. If you are unsure how to acknowledge the source you should first speak to your tutor and refer to the section abov

The University monitors a range of essay sources (e.g. online databases and personal essay writing services) and penalties for plagiarism are severe.

The regulations apply to all work either in examination conditions or not, and any submitted material may be checked for plagiarism, whether it has been done in examination conditions or not.

The University regulations on plagiarism can be found in the Conduct in Examinations section of the

https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/student-handbook?wssl=1, to which every student has access. Please see the Appendix of this Study Guide, below, for the further

For further information you may wish to look at:

http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism

soon as possible after your needs arise if this is later, to discuss possible alternative arrangements.

Students can approach the University Counselling Service independently and in complete confidence. Full detai

#### **APPFNDIX**

University definition of Plagiarism

#### Reproduced from:

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Presenting work or ideas from another source as your own, with or without consent of the original author, by incorporating it into your work without full acknowledgement. All published and unpublished material, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form, is covered under this definition, as is the use of material generated wholly or in part through use of artificial intelligence (save when use of Al for assessment has received prior

include re-using your own work without citation. Under the regulations for examinations, intentional or reckless plagiarism is a disciplinary offence.

Why does plagiarism matter?

Plagiarism is a breach of academic integrity. It is a principle of intellectual honesty that all members of the academic community should acknowledge their debt to the originators of the ideas, words, and data which form the basis for their own work. Passi work as your own is not only poor scholarship, but also means that you have failed to complete the learning process. Plagiarism is unethical and can have serious consequences for your future career; it also undermines the standards of your institution and of the degrees it issues.

Why should you avoid plagiarism?

There are many reasons to avoid plagiarism. You have come to university to learn to know and speak your own mind, not merely to reproduce the opinions of others - at least not without attribution. At first it may seem very difficult to develop your own views, and you will probably find yourself paraphrasing the writings of others as you attempt to understand and assimilate their arguments. However it is important that you learn to develop your own voice. You are not necessarily expected to become an original thinker, but you are expected to be an independent one - by learning to assess critically the work of others, weigh up differing arguments and draw your own conclusions. Students who plagiarise undermine the ethos of academic scholarship while avoiding an essential part of the learning process.

You should avoid plagiarism because you aspire to produce work of the highest quality. Once you have grasped the principles of source use and citation, you should find it relatively straightforward to steer clear of plagiarism. Moreover, you will reap the additional benefits of improvements to both the lucidity and quality of your writing. It is

important to appreciate that mastery of the techniques of academic writing is not merely a practical skill, but one that lends both credibility and authority to your work, and demonstrates your commitment to the principle of intellectual honesty in scholarship.

#### What to avoid

Verbatim (word for word) quotation without clear acknowledgement

Quotations must always be identified as such by the use of either quotation marks or indentation, and with full referencing of the sources cited. It must always be apparent to the reader which parts are your own independent work and where you have drawn on ideas and language from another source.

Cutting and pasting from the Internet without clear acknowledgement Information derived from the Internet must be adequately referenced and included in the bibliography. It is important to evaluate carefully all material found on the Internet, as it is less likely to have been through the same process of scholarly peer review as published sources.

#### Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing the work of others by altering a few words and changing their order, or by closely following the structure of their argument, is plagiarism if you do not give due acknowledgement to the author whose work you are using.

A passing reference to the original author in your own text may not be enough; you must ensure that you do not create the misleading impression that the paraphrased wording or the sequence of ideas are entirely your own. It is better to write a brief summary of the

paraphrase particular sections of his or her writing. This will ensure you have a genuine

It is not necessary to give references for facts that are common knowledge in your discipline. If you are unsure as to whether something is considered to be common knowledge or not, it is safer to cite it anyway and seek clarification. You do need to document facts that are not generally known and ideas that are interpretations of facts.

Does this only matter in examinations?

Although plagiarism in weekly essays does not constitute a University disciplinary offence, it may well lead to College disciplinary measures. Persistent academic under-performance can even result in your being sent down from the University. Although tutorial essays traditionally do not require the full scholarly apparatus of footnotes and referencing, it is still necessary to acknowledge your sources and demonstrate the development of your argument, usually by an in-text reference. Many tutors will ask that you do employ a formal citation style early on, and you will find that this is good preparation for later project and dissertation work. In any case, your work will benefit considerably if you adopt good scholarly habits from the start, together with the techniques of critical thinking and writing described above.

# Unintentional plagiarism

Not all cases of plagiarism arise from a deliberate intention to cheat. Sometimes students may omit to take down citation details when copying and pasting, or they may be genuinely ignorant of referencing conventions. However, these excuses offer no protection against a charge of plagiarism. Even in cases where the plagiarism is found to have been unintentional, there may still be a penalty.

It is your responsibility to find out the prevailing referencing conventions in your discipline, to take adequate notes, and to avoid close paraphrasing. The advice contained in your subject handbook will od dg4(vic)-5(e)66(c)-3(o)6(n)-4(tai)10(n)-4(e)11(d)-4()64(in)-5()64(your)63(lear)-