

# 1 Stepping out into University with Dyslexia



**This chapter looks at the many worries you have about being a student, your learning style and engaging with the support available to help you get organised and manage your studies.**



Stepping out, worries and all

Learning style – what is that exactly?

Get organised ... more juggle, less struggle!

Assignments – organising

Your stepping out toolkit

Lightning ideas

## Stepping out, worries and all

For most students, moving from school to university is a shock; it's sometimes even scary. From being a pupil in a class of 30, you suddenly find yourself as a student in a lecture theatre of 300, where organising and managing your own time and study is now your responsibility. There's no one telling you how long to study or what books to study, and there's no one nagging you about getting your homework in on time. It's all your responsibility now, and oh what freedom!

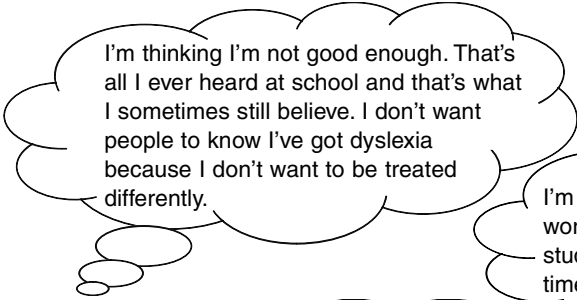
At first, coping with new demands and the new-found freedom to decide when, where and how you study can be hard and a little overwhelming at times, but somehow it will all work out. Just give it a little time and you'll soon settle down into student life. New things are always scary and hard at first for everyone. Remember, you're not the only new student; there are thousands of you, and, oh, don't worry about your dyslexia at university. You can't change the fact you have dyslexia. It's part and parcel of who you are, but it's only one part; it's not the whole of you. Just as being a student isn't the whole of you, there's a life outside of university. So make the most of your student days. Remember, it's only a few years in a whole lifetime. Enjoy it – the study, as well as the social aspect, dyslexia and all!

Don't make a big deal out of your dyslexia at university; don't let it stress you. Having dyslexia means your brain is wired differently. Think of a rabbit warren with all the furrows. Every brain has furrows; the dyslexic brain has extra furrows – maybe more, maybe wider ones. This means that when a message goes to the brain, it might go through an extra furrow and hit a different part of it, making the message scrambled. You just need time to sort out the message, to remember it and then process it.

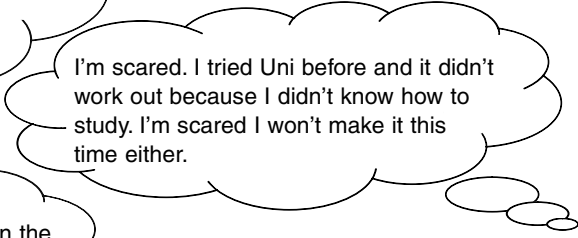
Having dyslexia means you see things differently, learn things differently and do things differently – nothing more, nothing less. So, as a student with dyslexia you bring added value to the educational environment because you see the nuts and bolts of how things work, and all the bits in between. This is so much more than students who don't have dyslexia, and so your contribution is valuably different.

Remember, there's plenty of good support, as well as lots of strategies and learning tools to help you along the way. It's important to tap into these; that's why they're there. First though, let's take a step back, look at things right on the spot where you stand and figure out what's really worrying you about starting university.

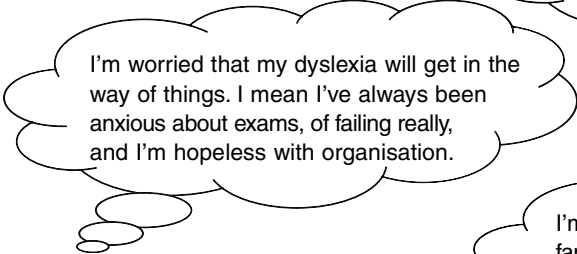
Feel these worries are no different from your own right now? Not sure how to allay your fears? Scared your small worries will become huge ones and affect your chances? Remember, it's not so much about



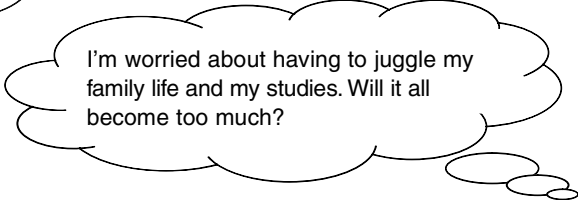
I'm thinking I'm not good enough. That's all I ever heard at school and that's what I sometimes still believe. I don't want people to know I've got dyslexia because I don't want to be treated differently.



I'm scared. I tried Uni before and it didn't work out because I didn't know how to study. I'm scared I won't make it this time either.



I'm worried that my dyslexia will get in the way of things. I mean I've always been anxious about exams, of failing really, and I'm hopeless with organisation.

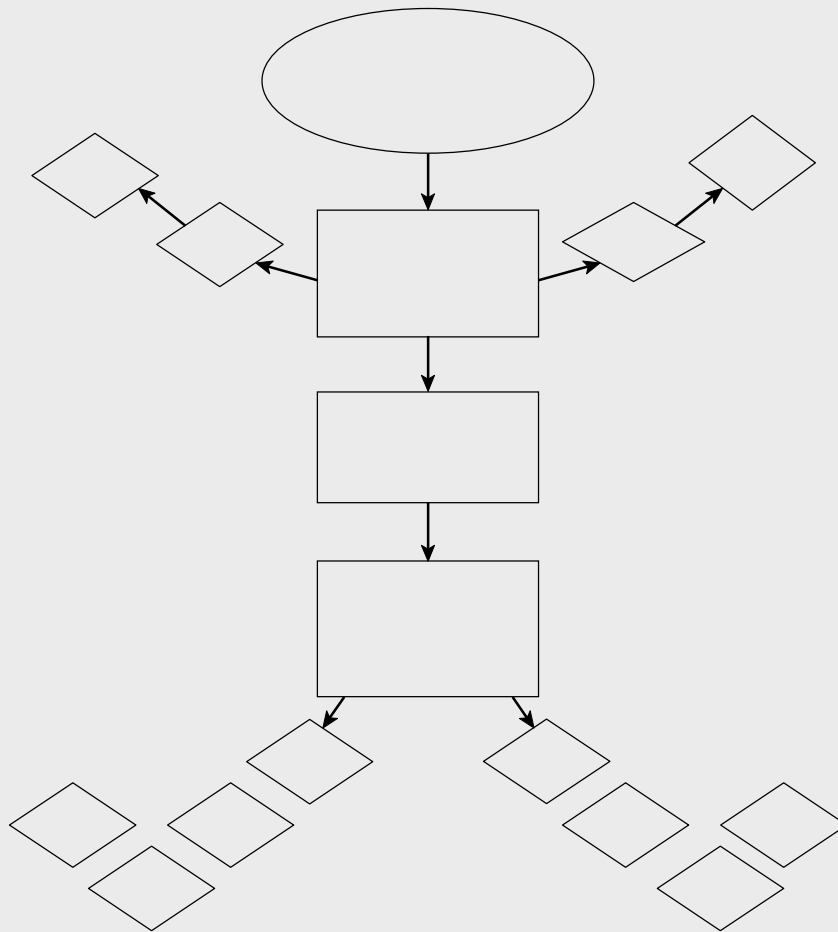


I'm worried about having to juggle my family life and my studies. Will it all become too much?



### Activity 1.1 Mapping Man: your worry – identifying, mapping, scaling

Colour the worry bubble that you can most identify with. Now think of your own worry and where you feel it – sore head, wobbly legs, nervous tummy? Write or draw your own worry bubble and place it on the Mapping Man:



Scale your feeling. How did reading the worry bubbles make you feel?

Circle your answer:

anxious                      upset                      relieved                      fine

How did writing your own worry bubble make you feel?

worse                      awkward                      encouraged                      optimistic

being a student and having dyslexia, it's more about what you do with it; how you manage your dyslexia and work with your worries that matters. One positive step is to take each worry you have and turn it into a question that can be answered. That way, it should seem less of a worry and more of a possibility.

Having worked with the worry bubbles, you'll see that we all come to university with different worries and concerns. Learning to work through these concerns one at a time informs our approach to study, our commitment, our motivation. Your experience will be no different. It's all part of the planning and organisation needed to help you settle into student life and manage your studies. The solution lies in turning your worries into questions that can be answered, and in tapping into the correct sources for these answers. Some are personal, others more practical, but they all have a role to play in your success. It's a good idea to identify the key people in the university who can provide these concrete answers, such as Student Services or your tutor.

Verbalising and visualising the responses to these practical concerns in this way should reassure you that dyslexia and university go together well. It's all a matter of understanding your dyslexia, believing in yourself and in your abilities, having an awareness of the support that's available and making good use of it; oh, and some good planning.

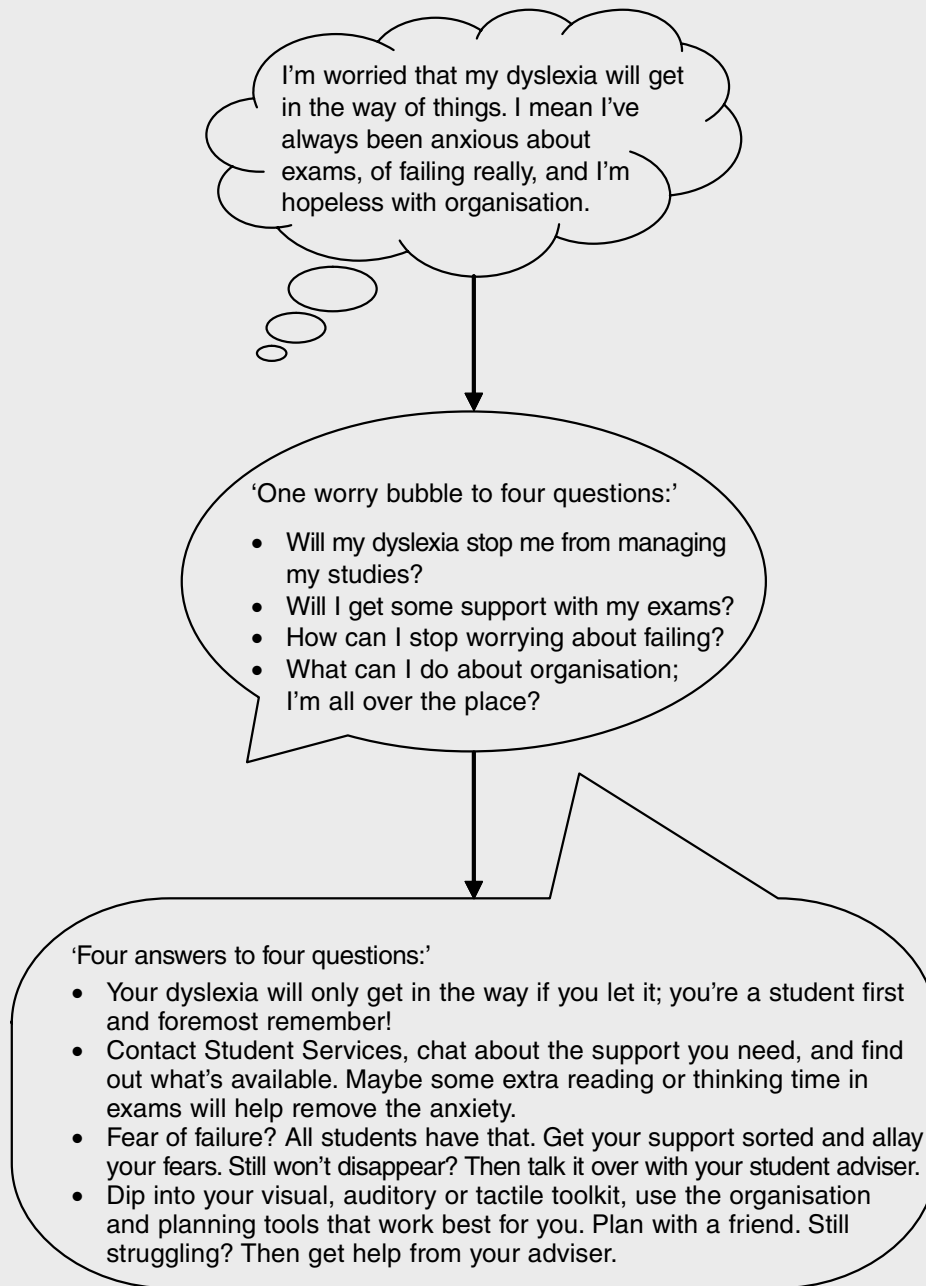
Working through the more personal issues may be a little more challenging, but it's all achievable. It's really a question of accessing the correct support and working positively with that towards your goal. It's separating the wheat from the chaff, and looking things squarely in the eye.

Working with a group of friends, take your Mapping Man worries and place them on the floor. Now walk around looking at all the worries. Does your worry seem less scary now? Given the choice, would you keep your own worry and work with that, or would you rather have someone else's? Discuss the worries, share ideas and experiences, and use the Mapping Man to record any solutions you've identified. Make sure you tap into the toolkit and any university resources that might be helpful. Keep your Mapping Man as a reference guide – from problem to solution. Take him on your study journey; add to his shapes to create a mini journal that records your experiences, strategies and solutions. This is your opportunity to write your own recipe for success; empower yourself!



## Activity 1.2 Re-shaping your worries

Working in a small group with other new students can make it easier to turn your worry into a question that can be given an answer. Place your worry bubbles on the table and categorise them into Personal and Practical. Now deal with the Practical section first; it's often easier to find concrete answers to the more practical issues first. Create a three-tiered flow chart of the practical issues to move from worry to question to answer. For example, let's take one of the worry bubbles above to illustrate the flow from one to the other:



## Learning style – what is that exactly?

We all have our own unique way of learning: specific styles, strategies, even rituals. What works for one, doesn't necessarily work for another. Some prefer doing things this way, others that. There's no right or wrong way, but the way you learn best is right for you. It's the style that comes most naturally to you, plays to your strengths, supports your learning processes and is specific to you as a learner; not simply memorising to pass an exam but learning to develop your knowledge. That's a learning style!



### Activity 1.3 Visual, auditory or tactile learner – or simply a bit of everything?

Do you:



use mind maps or shapes to connect and understand information?	
read information aloud so you can hear it?	
record information so you can listen back?	
use colours to highlight information and then read it?	
tap your fingers on your arm when counting?	
discuss concepts with others?	
use colours to highlight information and then create a picture or object?	
follow a mind map more easily than written instructions?	
use music or mnemonics to learn information?	
move around or walk when you're reading?	
see patterns in information?	
enjoy practical tasks that help you learn?	

Not quite sure of your style? Well, that's not so unusual. When something comes naturally, we seldom stop to think of it as a style. You've been doing it for so long that maybe it's time to give it a name. After all, moving from school to university means that you're moving from a more guided and structured way of learning to a more self-directed way. Knowing exactly what makes you tick and what makes learning work for you is helpful as you start university. That way, you can make the most of what's available in your toolkit and develop strategies that help to cement your study skills and your learning. Knowing your learning style will ensure that you'll use your time and energy more effectively, and what you learn sticks.

Want to know your dominant learning style? Complete Activity 1.3 and see Appendix 1 on the companion website for the answers and to calculate your style. Which one received most responses – V, A or T? Are you a bit of everything here but maybe one more than another? That's not so unusual. We all have a preference for one way of learning but quite comfortably tap into bits and pieces of other styles. That's why the style is specific to you! Still not quite sure? Want to test it out in Activity 1.4?

Which one did you opt for instinctively? Can you say why it was more inviting than the others? Then that's your natural style (see Appendix 2 on the companion website for the answers). So, if you've come out as a visual learner then you'll work best with the visual toolkit, likewise with the auditory and tactile. If you're a bit of everything, then dip in and out of every toolkit, working with the tools that you find easy to use, and stick with it. Implementing your own style of learning becomes more of a reality as you work towards organising and managing your time, meeting deadlines, passing exams.

## Get organised ... more juggle, less struggle!

It's all in the planning, they say; get yourself organised and you'll manage better! How often we've all heard that. What's the big deal

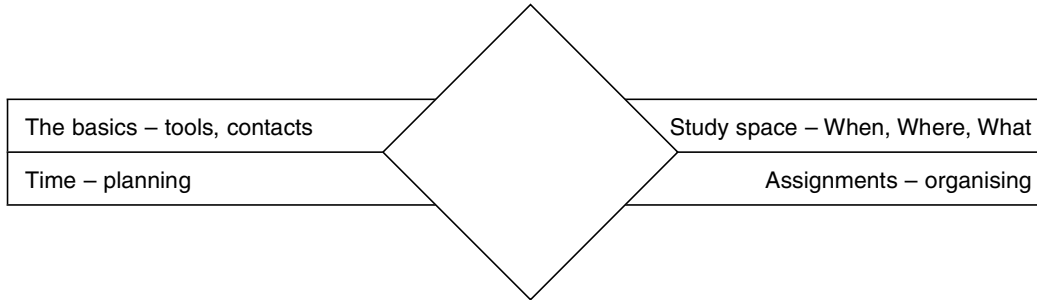


### Activity 1.4 Styled learning

Choose a task to explain your experience so far:

- Write a letter to a friend.
- Design a poster or create an object.
- Draw a picture.

about getting organised? Just go with the flow, take things as they come. Yes, well, while that might work for some, it can be a complete disaster for others. It's not just about the planning. It's about juggling everything that's thrown at you as a new student, and working out where these things fit in your organisation box.



### **The basics – tools, contacts**

Buying all the study tools you need for university might seem an obvious thing to do. After all, all students need to do this so they're ready to make a good start. How often, though, do we sit down to work and find we've forgotten our highlighter or left our notebook somewhere else? So the better organised you are at the start, the smoother your study periods will be. Good organisation is all a matter of looking at the bigger picture and working out the small things needed to manage set tasks. That way, you'll have less stress and more production.

### **Student Services**

Arranging your exam and general support early on in your studies will make starting out in student life more positive and less pressured. It's easy to forget to arrange your support needs once you get caught up in the everyday demands of student life. As the demands increase, your dyslexic difficulties will be put to the test and maybe even exposed. So be wise – contact Student Services, find out about the support available and arrange an early discussion of your needs, including training on specific assistive software, proofreading or specialist study support. Once your support is in place and you start using it, student life will become easier to manage.

### **Library**

Nowadays, lots of study information is readily available online; you're even encouraged to surf and search for articles. However, accessing information in this way doesn't suit everybody's learning style. Many students still prefer working with hard-copy texts in paper format. So





### Activity 1.5 What's needed in your study bag? Complete your list

As well as the basics, you might need some subject-related materials and assistive software to support your specific needs. For example, a design student would need some sketch pads, a nursing student a medical dictionary.

Writing tools	Stationery	Organisation	Subject-specific materials	Assistive software
pens and pencils	Post-it notes	wall planner	music score	Inspiration
highlighters	notebooks	mobile apps	sketch pad	Read & Write
	folders	diary	medical dictionary	digital recorder

take at least 30 minutes at the start of your studies to get to know your subject section in the library – the place you'll spend a lot of time! This will make life easier, and save you running around at the last minute, struggling to find information when assignment time comes around.

Of course, there's the searching for information. Library catalogues – a language in themselves; all new and puzzling, and the bane of all new students' lives. So support each other; form a library group, devise your own catalogue, share responsibilities, resources and information. Create your group's own centralised referencing system by using a sorting and referencing tool from the toolkit. Need a kick start to understand catalogue language and find your way around the search engine or shelves? Then do yourself a favour – find out the cataloguing system used by your university library. Is it the Dewey Decimal Classification System or Library of Congress? Don't forget, the principle of finding information is the same – call number or letter (reference) = subject.

For example:

Dewey

Library of Congress

Table 1.1 System

Call number	Subject	Call letter	Subject
370s	Education	L	Education

The longer a reference, the more specific a section's subject. For example, a special education book on dyslexia by Gilroy and Miles

(1996) would be classified as 371.914 Gil (Dewey) and LB1050.5 Gil (Library of Congress) with Gil representing the first three letters of the first author's surname.

Know your section, learn the call number or letter and locating information should become easier. Of course, there's the decimal point. Confused? Then separate the decimal point from the numbers. Why not use your W.Cube-It (Activity 1.6) to devise a system that's easy to follow. Place the decimal point in the diamond and the numbers in the W-triangles at either side. Add additional referencing information in the other triangles – library? location? short loan? Or use your Mapping Man (Activity 1.1) if that's easier.

Still struggling? Then ask library staff to explain the system, show you how things work or help you find a text; it's their job – they're used to people asking for help.

Referencing? Yes, there's the referencing. It's vital to record the correct references when surfing, searching and gathering information. Knowing exactly what you've read and cited in your assignment makes it easier when dealing with the reference section, something we all struggle with (see Chapter 9). Haven't we all wasted time running around looking for a journal article or book because we've forgotten to fully record the source? Referencing accurately from the outset will make it easier to find texts again, particularly if you need to double-check information. Make this your positive practice, save your time and energy, and, oh, reduce the chance of plagiarism (see Chapter 9). Personalise your own system by adding to the list below.

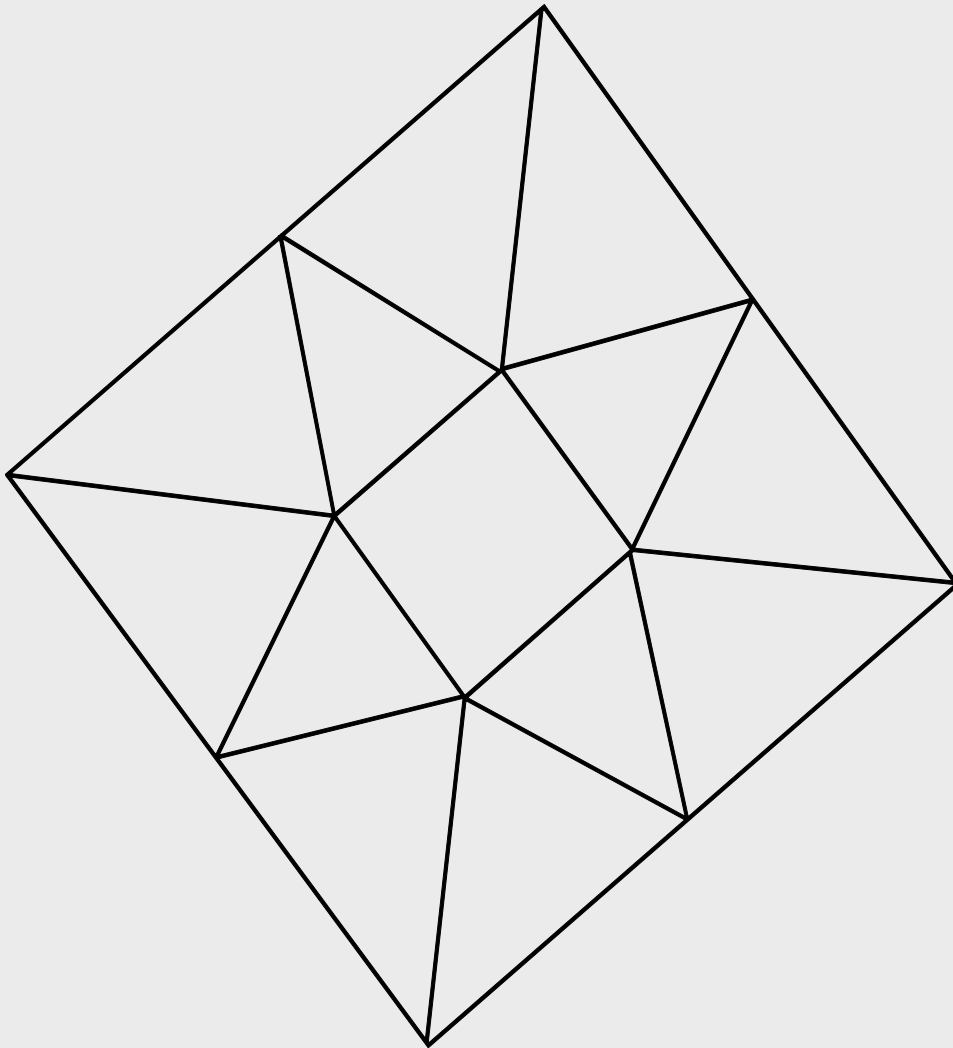
Table 1.2 Personal system

<b>What's the resource</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Where to find it</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>
book	B	university library	UL
journal	JN	national library	NL
article	A	department library	DL
electronic journal	EJ	electronic library	EL
blog	BL	reference section	RS
lecture notes	LN	short loan	SL
academic poster	AP	personally owned	your own initials
pamphlet	P		

If keeping a hard-copy notebook of your sources, strategically place Alpha-colour labels (see Table 1.3) to make it easier for you to record and locate references. Likewise, colour-code electronic information.



### Activity 1.6 Your w.w.w. study space



Place your choices in the W.Cube-It:

When do you work best? Morning, afternoon, evening? Where are you most productive? At university: library, study room, computer suite? At home: bedroom, kitchen, study area? What motivates you most? Working alone, in pairs, in groups?

Table 1.3 Alpha-colour

red	a b c	orange	o p q r
yellow	d e f g	purple	s t u v
pink	h i j	blue	w x y z
green	k l m n		

## Mitigation

You're more than a student, remember. Things happen, and often when you least expect them or least need them to happen. It's important, therefore, to understand the mitigation process at your university. You'll find information on your student website, so if you need to submit a mitigation form when the unexpected happens, you'll know exactly what to do.

The unexpected can be anything from taking ill while working on an assignment to dealing with a family bereavement at exam time. Mitigation isn't you needing extra time because of slow information processing skills or because you've been poorly organised. Mitigation is different. So if you're struggling to meet the deadline because of your dyslexia, then chat to your:

- tutor and negotiate some extra time
- adviser about study support to help organise your work.

If your mitigation is a little more complex and you need time out from study or need to request an extra year to complete your studies, this can be arranged. Needing extra time isn't so unusual; many students take time out or request longer to study for a variety of reasons. So think of your needs and what works best for you; chat to someone in Student Services. If you don't say what you need, how will they know, and how will they be able to help or support you?

## Study space – when, where, what

Put your worries to rest? Understood your learning style? Sorted out the basics of your support, your working tools and your key contacts? Now it's time to work out your w.w.w.: when, where, and what makes you motivated to study.

We all have our preferences, let's face it. Some like to work alone in the peace and quiet of the library early in the morning, others late into the night in their student flat, music blaring in the background and papers spread out around them on the floor. Maybe even in a

group. Does it really matter? Of course not! As long as the study space works for you.

Sometimes you'll stick to the same space, other times you'll need to change it and for different reasons. Perhaps it's the project you're working on or the group you're working with that requires a different study space. Don't stress about changing it to suit different needs. However, if your regular study space isn't working for you, then, most likely, neither are you. Why not change it? Change your space, change your production rate.

### **Time – planning**

New life, new structure and so much time, or so it seems. Remember, it's your responsibility now, so make it work for you. Good time management needs careful planning and organisation of both your personal and student life. Allocate time for family, social and work commitments, as well as study periods. Factor in your surfing and searching time, your reading, annotating and writing-up time. Plan and organise your time around ongoing lectures, tutorials or group projects. Give some structure to your day and allow your confidence as a student to grow and develop. Soon, the worries you came with will disappear.

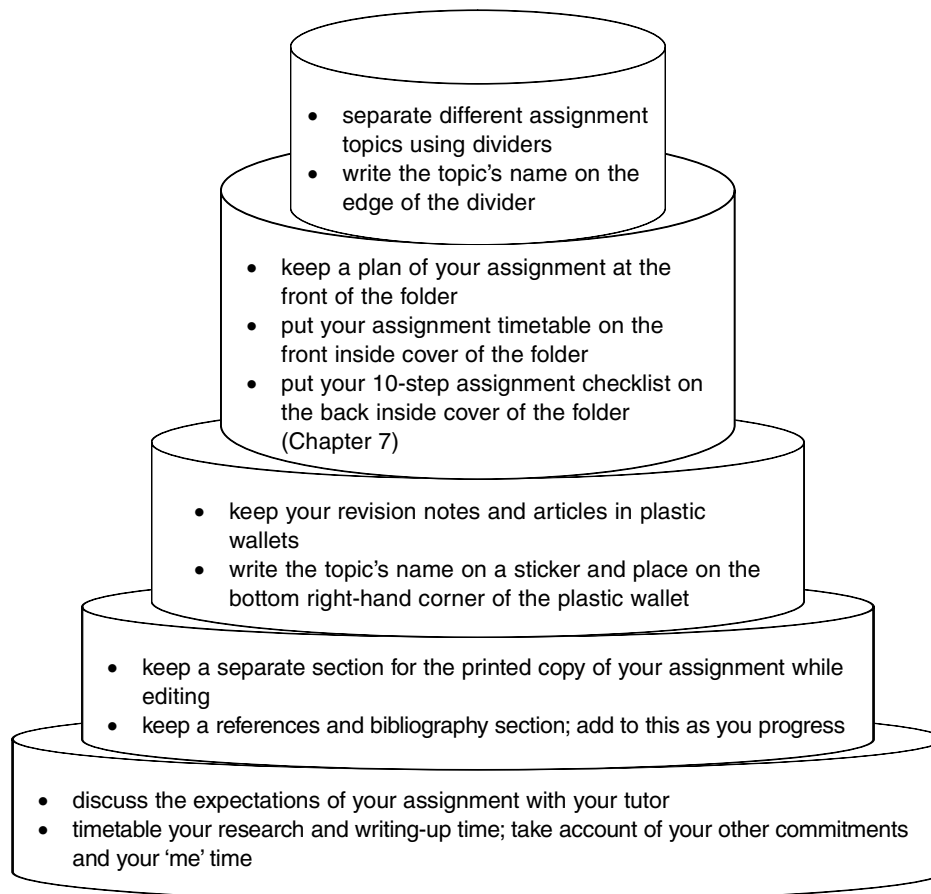
### **Assignments – organising**

It's true! You're generally not given an assignment as soon as you start university, but it won't be long before the first one comes along, and then the second, and maybe even another at the same time. As you're studying more than one subject, you'll soon find assignments pile up and, oh, the struggle trying to juggle. How will you manage it all, we hear you say?

Stop here, think back to your school assignments and how you worked your way through these. Think of the times you planned them or didn't plan them and the consequences of each. Which seemed to work better for you? Be aware! University assignments are much larger and much more demanding than anything you've done before. There's more reading, more organisation, more critical thinking, more discussion, more writing, and, oh, more referencing. So with previous experience in your pocket, move forward wisely and start planning ahead. Draw up a basic plan – organise your time, your assignment folder, your notes, your task, your student life.

## The 'planning' building blocks

Planning and organising your assignment folder gives value to what you do, and saves time and energy later. Electronic folder or hard copy – choose what works best for you. The same planning principles apply to each. For the electronic folder, use a mind-mapping tool.

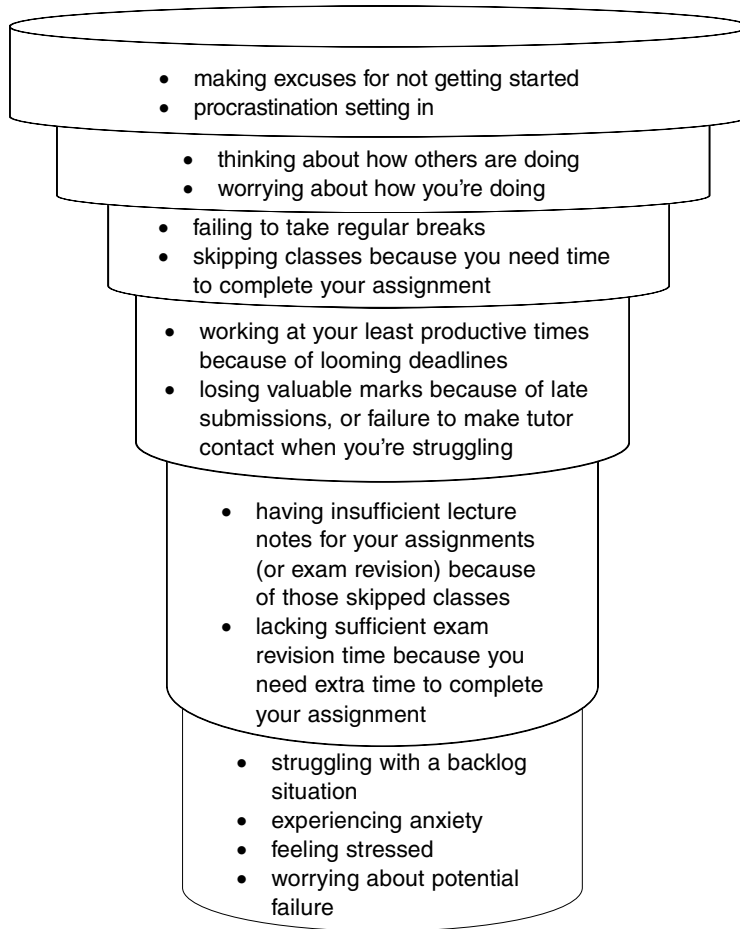


## The 'not planning' downward tunnel

Not planning your studies can lead you through a downward tunnel that results in ultimate failure.

Having worked through your worries about starting university with dyslexia, worked out your learning style, addressed your support needs, and organised yourself, life as a student should seem more positive now. Not convinced? Need more encouragement? Then look at Mirroring Janus in Activity 1.7.

Which situation seems most favourable? It's your choice.



### Activity 1.7 Mirroring Janus – the worst and the best

Make a note of the best thing that could happen to you, if you remain organised and manage your studies. Then make a note of the worst thing that could happen, if you don't manage.

Worst




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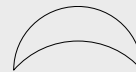


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Best




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## Your stepping out toolkit

The stepping out toolkit is designed to help you settle into university life, set your worries aside and build your confidence as an independent learner. There's something for all of you in the toolkit, regardless of how you like to learn or how confused you feel when you first walk through the university doors. Remember to check out Appendix 7 on the companion website to see how these tools operate.


### The visual learner's stepping out toolkit

This toolkit lets you see things as you plan and organise your student life. By using pictures or diagrams, you'll soon see the bigger picture, and all the nuts and bolts of university life. That way, you should see the possibilities in the different contribution you bring to the educational environment. Things should seem less scary!

	• Bubbl.us	• Mind Genius	• Storyboarding
	• Coloured stickers and Post-its	• MyWebspiration	• Topicscape
	• Dabbleboards	• Noticeboard	• Wall planner
	• Inspiration	• Personal reference system	• W.Cube-It
	• Mapping Man	• Sticky text highlighter strips	

### The auditory learner's stepping out toolkit

Need to hear things so you understand better? Then this toolkit offers opportunities to talk things over, to hear things aloud and to think things through. It allows you to integrate what you hear with what you think and how you approach and manage tasks. Engaging with your educational environment should be smoother.


	• Background, relaxation music	• Library support	• Read & Write
	• Calendar	• Mentoring or buddy system	• Stress management
	• ClaroRead	• Mobile A to Z organiser	• Student Adviser
	• Diary	• Mp3	• Study log
	• Digital recorder	• MyStudyBar	• Turnitin
	• Journal	• Notebook	

### The tactile learner's stepping out toolkit

Enjoy doing things while trying to learn? Feel this helps information 'stick' better? Then the tools in this toolkit will allow you to develop



strategies that support your specific learning style. Working comfortably with these tools should reinforce your learning process and give value to your educational contribution.

	• Background, relaxation music	• Mini reflective journal	• Study Buddies
	• Coloured labels	• Stress ball	bookmarks
	• Highlighters	• Subject-related	• Wobble board
	• Mindfulness exercises	online activities	• Worry stone

 **Lightning ideas**

- Find answers to your worries and box them
- Work out your learning style and stick to it
- Match your learning style with your toolkit
- Remember your personal w.w.w. study space
- Remember the 'me' times in your timetable
- Take one day off, free from study, to recharge your batteries.
- Don't study for more than 45 minutes at a time
- Take at least 30 minutes early on in your student life to know your library section
- Contact Student Services, find out about the support available and arrange an early discussion about your support needs
- Engage with your support
- Check your study bag has all you need
- Leave your worries at the door and step into your new learning environment with new-found confidence
- Believe in your abilities!



Different learning style, different educational contribution



Please go to the Companion Website for this book [www.sagepub.co.uk/gribben](http://www.sagepub.co.uk/gribben) to access downloadable resources, all the activities featured here and a podcast for this chapter.