



New College, Oxford

**Study Guide**  
For Undergraduates

Please read in conjunction with the Dean's Handbook:

<https://www.new.ox.ac.uk/deans-handbook>

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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;
- Provide information on academic and personal support.

A study guide, or a Handbook, may also be provided by your Department or Faculty tailored to your subject needs: the New College Freshers' Study Guide is complementary to this information. You should ensure that you read, and retain, both this Study Guide and your Department or Faculty Handbook: the latter will have detailed information about your course, options, and examinations.

## 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 subject and become adept at handling 'the tools of the trade', be they pipettes or theodolites, 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 Tutor's office or study in College, but it may take place in their office in their Department. Your first tutorials are likely to be with a Fellow of New College or a College Lecturer, but later on they may be with a specialist in your subject who is associated with another College. All undergraduates usually have one or more tutorials each week for the eight weeks of Full Term, each lasting approximately one hour. You may be required to produce work in advance or to take it along to the tutorial for marking afterwards. Your Tutor will tell you what they want you to do.

In the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Life Sciences, the work will often take the form of an essay. Mathematicians and Physical Scientists will usually have a set of problems to solve, but they may also be given essays in some topics. Some Tutors like students to read their work aloud, summarise the main arguments of the piece, or work through a problem on a board; whereas other Tutors simply like to hold a discussion on the work. It depends on the Tutor and the subject matter. If you are unsure what is required of you, ask your Tutor when they set the work.

## **How do I prepare for a tutorial?**

It is important to be well prepared for a tutorial. As soon as you receive the reading list and essay title or problem sheet, read through the instructions thoroughly and think about the questions or title. Essays and sets of problems are often based on the lectures you have received or on key texts from your reading list.

If you are unsure what is required of you (including the length of the essay) or have any difficulties, contact your Tutor as soon as possible. Do not be afraid to ask for guidance.

If you have an essay to produce, most tutors will give you a reading list to help you get started, or they will be able to recommend texts that will help you to target your reading effectively. Try to discuss the work with other students in College and your Department or Faculty. They may have some useful ideas or perspectives. You will need to organise your time to produce your work, maybe in less than seven days, whilst attending other lectures and classes. For advice on how to do this, please see the separate section on 'Managing your workload'.

At first, reading lists always appear quite daunting and most students initially feel that they need to read everything on the list in order to get to grips fully with a topic. Although this may be partially true, you will have a limited time in which to read and may have to cope with competition from other students for the same texts. It is therefore necessary to be pragmatic and make reading lists manageable. This can be achieved through some

awareness of the purposes of reading and careful selection of the texts: ask your Tutor for guidance about this.

There are different types of reading lists. At the start of a particular course, you may be given a list of basic references fundamental to the course which will be referred to at different times and may be essential reading. You may then be given supplementary reading lists for specific essay topics: there are often one or more basic texts that are essential reading. Ask your Tutor to recommend these basic texts and a few supplementary ones. If this is not possible, do a quick survey of some texts to find the ones most relevant to the subject or essay in question.

### **Using the library**

When you have your reading list, set aside some time to search SOLO (the online library catalogue) and familiarise yourself with where you can access the required literature. It is likely that the College Library will have the majority of the books you need. However, you may find that you need to visit more than one library to find all of your key texts. During Freshers' Week you will have had library inductions where you will have been shown how to use the online catalogue, but if you need further assistance finding resources, your College Librarians can help, or ask at the Information Desk in any of the libraries you need to use. It's a good idea to take some time to explore the libraries in your first week here so that you are prepared for when you need to access them throughout your course.

There are three sorts of libraries in Oxford:

- College libraries, which are for the use of members of that College;
- The large central library system, known as The Bodleian Libraries or The University Libraries (including the central Bodleian, or “The Bod”, the Radcliffe Science Library, the Social Science Library, etc.), which are spread over several locations in central Oxford and are largely open to all members of the university;
- Subject-based departmental libraries (such as the Ruskin School of Art Library).

You will be able to borrow books from New College and The Bodleian Libraries, but for anything that is reference-only you can copy or scan, within copyright restrictions. Most of the journals you will need to access are available online via SOLO and are freely accessible to you wherever you are in the world using your ‘Single Sign On’, or by installing the University’s ‘Virtual Private Newtork’ (VPN) software on your computer.

## **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. When buying your own books, it's much cheaper to get them second-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.

1. 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 perspective arising from the author's discussion of the material.
6. An index is located at the back of some books. This should not be ignored. It will list the topics covered in the book with appropriate page numbers for each subject. Using the index for references to a specific topic will prevent you wasting time unnecessarily.

7. For factual information, it is often unnecessary to read the whole book. Carefully skim the table of contents and index to select the most useful parts.
8. If you have a particularly difficult piece to read, you may need to read it more than once – first to understand the basic ideas, then more closely to get answers to the specific questions you have in mind. You may need to go back and read a simple text as an introduction.

Notes are taken for different purposes, and those purposes determine the amount of detail required in your note-taking. You might be tempted to try and write down everything you read. This is often just not practicable, or even desirable. When making notes, look for the key points or main ideas: these may be summarised in the preface, in the introduction, and at the beginning of each chapter. Headings and subheadings may be useful indicators, as well as where the author places stress on particular words, by italicising, underlining or putting into bold. Main ideas have to be supported with detail and this can vary according to the potential use of the notes. You may well need to use the notes for revision a year or several months ahead, so they will have to contain sufficient detail and be organised in such a way that they can make sense at a later date. Generally, detailed information should support, clarify or illustrate the main ideas.

At university, Tutors are definitely not looking for a regurgitation of your notes. Be critical when you read. Ask yourself some of the following questions:

- Is the material well presented?
- Do the facts support the main ideas of the author?
- Is the author biased?
- Does the material support the conclusion?
- How does the author's perspective compare with those of others who have written on the same subject?
- What is your perspective?

As you start to read, you should begin to develop the arguments for your essay or start to think about how to solve the problems.

- Remember always to bear in mind the questions you have been asked in your essay, as this will help you to understand what the Tutor is looking for and it will also help you to focus your reading and note-taking.
- In some subjects, it can be useful to take notes under broad subject headings on separate pieces of paper, rather than to separate your notes by virtue of which text



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 (see ‘Plagiarism’, below). Always note down the source of the information (see ‘Citing references’, 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 guide, you should allow at least a morning or afternoon for planning and the same for the writing process. Since each subject will have a different style of writing, your Tutor will be able to advise you appropriately and give you specific tips.

Here are some general guidelines that apply to all subjects:

1. *Write a plan of what you intend to include.* This is vital to writing a good essay and worth spending time on. It will help you not only to digest the information, but also to organise your notes and ideas into a reasoned argument. Ensure there is unity in each paragraph (it may help to deal with each point in a separate paragraph) and a logical order to your ideas. Once you have done this, re-read the essay title and ensure that you are about to answer the question in full.
2. *Consider your audience.* You are writing for an intelligent person who knows more than you do about the subject. Some background material may be superfluous but take care not to cut out relevant information. Ask your Tutor if you need advice on how much background information to include. Remember that, when you come to revise for your exams, you will be able to use your notes as well as your essay, so you do not need to include everything you have read in your essay.
3. *Clarity of expression* is essential in any essay. Do not use overly long sentences and avoid cumulative dependent clauses. Try reading your essay aloud, as this will also help you to identify grammatical errors.
4. *Set your work out neatly.* Do not overcrowd a page or start quotations near the end of a line. If you are quoting verse, ensure it is in verse form. If you are quoting a formula, ensure it is clearly separated from the text. You could consider writing only on one side of the paper, to allow you to take notes during the tutorial. Ensure you

leave enough space around the text to allow your Tutor to add comments if they take the work in for marking. A Tutor's feedback is essential to improving your work.

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 practice to do so for some of your tutorial work.
6. *Your introduction should be succinct*. Outline the main points of your argument or the scientific technique in this paragraph. Analyse the question, explain any difficult or ambiguous concepts and then outline your proposed answer.
7. *Do not stray from the title*. If interesting ideas come to light during your reading, note them down and discuss them during the tutorial: do not include them if they are peripheral to the subject. These additional notes may be useful for revision.
8. *Consider the style of language* that you are using and always check that your spelling, vocabulary and grammar are accurate.
9. *Only include relevant references and quotations*. If you are quoting work, ensure that you cite the source. Further details on how to do this are given below. If you are quoting from a poem or text in one of the humanities subjects, you should also give a page or line reference. Ask your Tutor how to do this.
10. *Be analytical – do not just write a survey of the literature*. If you disagree with a published opinion, justify your disagreement with evidence and argument. Be objective in your analysis.
11. *Try not to run out of steam before you get to the conclusion!* You need to include a carefully set out conclusion in which you should restate the arguments or main points of the essay and explain how you have reached your conclusions. You can also use 'scholarly caution' in this section, employ words such as 'perhaps' and 'possibly' in association with your ideas. Do not be afraid to mention unresolved points or to raise them in the tutorial.
12. *Consult your Tutor* about whether you should include a bibliography at the end of the essay, listing all the books you have read or otherwise found information in, when preparing your essay.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless you have alternative exam arrangements agreed.

## 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 are set so that you can ask your Tutor about any sections which you do not understand.
2. *The problems may relate to a specific set of lectures or a chapter in one of the key texts.* Your Tutor will be able to advise you on where to look for information. Spend some time reading the relevant texts or lecture notes, to help you to clarify the ideas in your mind.
3. *Annotate your lecture notes or create supplementary notes if this helps you,* but do not lose sight of the task in hand.
4. *Set your work out neatly.* Do not overcrowd a page; writing on one side of the paper allows you to take notes during the tutorial. If you are quoting a formula, ensure it is clearly separated from the text or your other workings. Ensure you leave enough space around the text to allow your Tutor to add comments, as their feedback is essential to improving your work.
5. *Write legibly or type your work.* Remember that you will have to write your answers by hand for your examinations so it can be a good way of practising for exams to do so for some hand-writing of your tutorial work.
6. *Include all your workings* unless your Tutor has specifically said not to. If you are uncertain how many of the intermediary steps to include, ask your Tutor.

## 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. Author's name, generally in the format of 'surname, initials';
2. Year of publication;
3. Title of chapter or paper;
4. Title of book or journal;
5. *For books*: publisher, edition number;
6. *For journals*: volume, issue and page numbers of articles.

Two examples:

"Two distinct outbreak patterns have been reported for microdochium patch disease on golf turf, suggesting that *Microdochium nivale* may not be the sole disease-causing organism (Gange & Case, 2003)."

Gange, A.C. & Case, S.J. (2003). Incidence of microdochium patch disease in golf putting greens and a relationship with arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi. Grass and Forage Science. **58** (1): 58–62.

This myth, told originally by the ancient Greeks, describes a blessed island 'beyond the north wind,' a paradise of plenty, a land of perpetual Spring 'with a delightful climate, exempt from every harmful blast,' where everyone was healthy and happy.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*, 4, 12, 26.

If you record this kind of information whilst you are doing your preparatory reading it will be easy to reorganise into the format preferred by your Tutor. Ask your Tutor for advice on citing references as each subject area can vary.

## 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 Tutor's experience if you treat it like a personal

lecture. Ask your Tutor to explain any concepts that you are unsure of and be prepared for a debate!

7. Do not worry about disagreeing with your Tutor: so long as your argument is well-reasoned they will respect your opinions. You should also be prepared to discuss ideas with your tutorial partners both inside and outside of the tutorial. Be prepared to speak up in a discussion and enjoy yourself!
8. The input your Tutor gives you will depend on how you approach the tutorial. This is the benefit of the tutorial system, which is the most flexible method of teaching. Your Tutor can respond to your needs for clarification and your opinion on the subject. This means that you may cover different subject matter to a fellow student who has produced work to the same title.
9. You must attend scheduled tutorials, so always have your diary/personal organiser with you when you arrange them.
10. If you are experiencing particular difficulties with your work or feel that for one reason or another you are not best suited to your tutorial partner, make a separate appointment with your Tutor to discuss this. If you feel reluctant to speak to your tutor, then arrange to talk to the Warden.
11. After your tutorial, take a few minutes to write down what you have learned while it is still fresh in your mind.

## Making the most of lectures

In 0<sup>th</sup> Week of each Term, your Tutor will advise you about the lecture programme – which lectures, and how many, you should be attending in a week. You should also be able to look up the lecture lists on the web at:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/lectures>

In most subjects, lectures form an integral part of the course and are viewed as complementary to tutorials and classes. In a few subjects they are intended to be the main form of teaching. Lectures also have the following advantages:

1. The lecturer is often more up-to-date than the textbooks or your Tutor (they have access to a wider range of source material and the latest ideas, often because they are doing the research themselves). In subjects where the source material is diverse and scattered, the lecturer will have spent time and energy on searching out material, sifting it, and ordering it. Why repeat all that hard work yourself?
2. The lecturer may have a different viewpoint or a different way of explaining things from any text or your Tutor (and you may learn more from comparing different approaches than by relying on a single source).
3. The lecturer may just be very good at making their subject interesting, exciting and/or relevant.
4. The lecturer may be so well known in your subject that it is interesting to hear them live and find out what sort of person they are.
5. Examiners may use the lecture courses to decide on the sorts of things they will set questions on and the depth of knowledge they expect in the answers (i.e. use the lectures to define the exam syllabus), as well as basing specific questions on material that they know has been covered in detail and is available to all students (unlike material covered in college tutorials).

Take lectures seriously and get into the lecture habit early. These are a good way of meeting your contemporaries in your subject from other colleges, and of hearing their Tutors holding forth. You may later regret having missed the chance of hearing Dr Smith or Professor Jones on your subject.

Take notes during lectures, if only to help you concentrate on what is being said. However, the first priority is to understand what is going on. Do not try to take overly-detailed, hurried notes during the lecture. Take down major points and the overall thread of the argument.

Do you feel that you are not getting anything out of the first lecture or two? Even so, it is worth persevering. You may have done the work already – but you will probably understand the subject better for having gone over it twice. You may feel that the lectures are not relevant to work you are doing at present – but they may be relevant to work that you will be doing in the next term or next year. You may have difficulty understanding what is going on – but even if you understand only 10 per cent of the ideas, that still gives you a 10 per cent start if you have to tackle the subject later in tutorials or classes. You may find the lecturer boring – but that does not devalue the content: give lectures a chance to warm up before you decide to drop them. In the sciences, don't drop any lectures lightly. Scientists will also be busy with practical classes, so should appreciate the time-saving aspects of lectures all the more!

Every lecturer has their own way of organising information, but you are likely to encounter two types of lectures and you will develop a different style of note taking for each. In the first kind, the lecturer gives an overview of the subject material and in the second kind you will be given an introduction to specific techniques. Often the second kind of lecture is more structured than the first. Be prepared to change the way you take your notes during the course of the lecture. It is often worthwhile to read through your notes immediately after the lecture so that you can highlight the key points and annotate where necessary. Some students re-write all their lecture notes afterwards, but you need to consider whether this is an effective use of your time.



## 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 into this diary so you can see where you need to be and when. Keep an up-to-date copy of this information in your room (lots of places give away free wall planners at the start of term – Freshers’ Fair is a good source for your first one), then you can book in times for major tasks – such as preparing for tutorials or writing up your laboratory notes. Being organised will help you to make the most of your relaxation time, because you should have fewer of those nagging feelings that you should be somewhere else.
- Keep on top of your filing. You may wish to begin with a single large folder with coloured paper dividers for each subject, but you will soon find that your work out-grows this. It may prove useful to have a file for each unit of your course, each with three sections: (1) lecture notes; (2) tutorial work and notes; (3) Practicals or Miscellaneous.
- It is worth considering when you are at your most productive to get the most out of your work. Most people have a time of day when they know they produce their best work. Try to schedule preparation work for tutorials during your most productive part of the day and use your less productive times for more routine tasks such as checking your emails.

Remember to include breaks in your schedule. It is important to take a break away from your desk if you are becoming unproductive – a five-minute break may be enough to get you back into optimal working mode. If you have problems deciding what to do when, consider whether the task is important or unimportant, urgent or non-urgent. Do not be afraid to put a ‘Do Not Disturb’ sign on your door or to ignore your mobile phone and emails when you are working – everyone understands the need for periods of uninterrupted work!

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 the majority of your time.

*The key to success is planning your days, and sticking to your plan!*

### ***Using your vacations***

Both on the academic and non-academic side, you're likely to find yourself very pressed for time in Oxford during the eight weeks of Full Term. You can remove some of this pressure by making good academic use of the vacations. In a number of subjects the vacation is the time for reading large amounts of essential texts; in others, it is the time for extended essays or projects. It is most important not to neglect this work since failure to cover the texts or other preparatory work in vacations can seriously impede your tutorial work in the following term.

Vacations are also a very good time for general background reading and for tidying up work left over from the previous Term. Your Tutor may also set specific vacation work. If you leave this until you come back to Oxford at the beginning of the next Term, then you will just create more problems for yourself. You need to plan your vacation work before you leave Oxford to make sure that you have available all the information and resources that you need (e.g. borrowing books you need from Oxford libraries or arranging the use of a library close to where you will be staying during the vacation). You will be able to borrow books from most libraries for the whole vacation, though libraries are also typically open throughout the summer and Easter vacations if you find you are missing anything.

Of course, we are aware that vacations are important for seeing family and friends, re-charging your batteries, and probably earning some money. But you should be aware that you will need to set aside a reasonable proportion of them for your academic work.

## 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 privately online via the Colleges' OxCORT reporting system.

Your progress will also be monitored through two kinds of **"Collections"**.

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 be set, and you should plan your vacation work accordingly. Collections are taken under exam conditions – i.e. invigilated, timed, and in silence – in Hall and the Conduit Room. The timetable is e-mailed to students in -1st Week. Tutors will make every effort to return marked Collection scripts by the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> week.

Collections are valuable for consolidating a topic through revision, giving continuous exam practice through your time at Oxford, and providing you with an idea of the standard of your work in relation to the standards used in University exams.

2. In addition you will have **"Report Reading"** with your College tutors. Like **"Collections"**, **"Report Readings"** are compulsory.

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the copying or paraphrasing of other people's work or ideas into your own work 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) or under the College's Academic Discipline Procedures (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 above entitled 'Citing references'.

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 *Essential Information for Students (Proctors' and Assessor's Memorandum)* <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 information on the University's definition of plagiarism.

For further information you may wish to look at:

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

## Study Support

There are a large number of books with advice on how to develop your study skills.

The College Library has a Study Skills section, which contains books on a wide range of general issues as well as subject specific texts and your Departmental or Faculty Library will have similar materials available.

For a description of Oxford tutorials, including their content and purpose, see:

Palfreyman, D. (ed) (2001) *The Oxford Tutorial: 'Thanks, you taught me how to think'* OxCHEPS.

Blackwell's Bookshop publishes a range of leaflets on different aspects of study, including 'How to write essays', 'Reading for study', 'Improve your memory', 'Citing references' and 'Taking notes from lectures'. Blackwell's sells these, and a good selection of other books and guides, in its Education section in the Norrington Room.

Oxford University Student Union (Oxford SU) offers comprehensive advice as well as provides an extensive range of information resources to help with study and revision skills. See their website for further information: <https://www.oxfordsu.org/>

The University also has a useful section on revision and exams, including coping with anxiety or insomnia:

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/revision?wssl=1>

### ***Specific Learning Difficulties***

If you have a SpLD (e.g dyslexia or dyspraxia), there is a range of support that the University and College can offer. We do encourage you to come forward, as several students do every year, so we can work out the best ways to offer any help you need.

If you have already diagnosed with a SpLD then we strongly advise that you let your College Tutor know so appropriate support can be provided. You should also make an appointment to see the Academic Registrar ([tuition@new.ox.ac.uk](mailto:tuition@new.ox.ac.uk)). The Academic Registrar is the College Disability Coordinator and can request alternative arrangements for University exams, College Collections, and any study support you may require. If your existing report does not meet University standards, we will arrange for you to be reassessed.

### ***Alternative Examination Arrangements***

Alternative examination arrangements can be put in place for candidates with disabilities, including Specific Learning Difficulties. You should contact the College's Disability Coordinator ([tuition@new.ox.ac.uk](mailto:tuition@new.ox.ac.uk)) as early in your first term at Oxford as practicable, or as

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

The deadline for the College submitting a request for Alternative Examination Arrangements is Friday of Week 4 during the term before the examinations take place. Therefore, the College needs to know of your difficulties as far in advance of Week 4 as possible, so that alternative arrangements can be discussed and assessments made in order to find the fairest set of recommendations to fit your situation. If you would like to look up more information about disability support at Oxford, please see: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/disability?wssl=1>

**Just because you have had extra time, or other alternative arrangements, in exams at school does not mean that you automatically will have that at Oxford: you should contact the Academic Registrar in your first term at Oxford to discuss your arrangements.**

## **Welfare support**

If you have academic or personal issues that you would like to discuss with someone, the first point of contact is your tutor. Every student also has access to the College's welfare team.

### **The Cox and Salvesen Fellows**

The two Cox and Salvesen Fellows are happy to talk to all New College students and are a good first port of call for information about services and support available within College and the university. To make an appointment:

- The Cox and Salvesen Fellows may be contacted via the Porters Lodge on (01865-2)79555/79500
- Email [welfare@new.ox.ac.uk](mailto:welfare@new.ox.ac.uk)

### **The Chaplain**

Revd Dr Erica Longfellow is the College Chaplain. She works alongside other welfare officers to provide pastoral care for all members of New College, regardless of any religious affiliation. She is very experienced in all aspects of student wellbeing and can be contacted at [erica.longfellow@new.ox.ac.uk](mailto:erica.longfellow@new.ox.ac.uk) or by phone via the Porters' Lodge (01865 2)79555.

### **The Home Bursar**

**Gez Wells** is available to chat to students and talk about personal matters, domestic issues or concerns around life in College.

- drop into his room (4 OB, through his PA's Office)
- call (01865 2)79560
- or email [gez.wells@new.ox.ac.uk](mailto:gez.wells@new.ox.ac.uk)

### **JCR Welfare Officers**

The **JCR** and **MCR committees** have elected welfare officers who can refer students to the right people for advice and guidance.

Students can approach the **University Counselling Service** independently and in complete confidence. Full details of University-run welfare schemes are detailed at: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/counselling>. The Counselling Service is located at 3 Worcester Street (near the Gloucester Green coach station). You can ring the University Counselling Service on 01865 270300 or email them at ([counselling@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:counselling@admin.ox.ac.uk)).

**OUSU** also runs a full range of support: <https://www.oxfordsu.org/wellbeing/student-advice/>

**Nightline**, run by students, offers support and advice between 8pm and 8am from 0<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> Weeks on (01865) 270270 (just dial 70270 from any University telephone); further information is available at: <https://oxfordnightline.org/>

If you do experience difficulties, there really are many sources of help: so, please, *never* be afraid to ask.

## APPENDIX

### University definition of Plagiarism

Reproduced from:

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

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 AI for assessment has received prior authorisation e.g. as a reasonable adjustment for a student's disability). Plagiarism can also 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. Passing off another's 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 author's overall argument in your own words, indicating that you are doing so, than to paraphrase particular sections of his or her writing. This will ensure you have a genuine grasp of the argument and will avoid the difficulty of paraphrasing without plagiarising. You must also properly attribute all material you derive from lectures.

### **Collusion**

This can involve unauthorised collaboration between students, failure to attribute assistance received, or failure to follow precisely regulations on group work projects. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are entirely clear about the extent of collaboration permitted, and which parts of the work must be your own.

### **Inaccurate citation**

It is important to cite correctly, according to the conventions of your discipline. As well as listing your sources (i.e. in a bibliography), you must indicate, using a footnote or an in-text reference, where a quoted passage comes from. Additionally, you should not include anything in your references or bibliography that you have not actually consulted. If you cannot gain access to a primary source you must make it clear in your citation that your knowledge of the work has been derived from a secondary text (for example, Bradshaw, D. Title of Book, discussed in Wilson, E., Title of Book (London, 2004), p. 189).

### **Failure to acknowledge assistance**

You must clearly acknowledge all assistance which has contributed to the production of your work, such as advice from fellow students, laboratory technicians, and other external sources. This need not apply to the assistance provided by your tutor or supervisor, or to ordinary proofreading, but it is necessary to acknowledge other guidance which leads to substantive changes of content or approach.

### **Use of material written by professional agencies or other persons**

You should neither make use of professional agencies in the production of your work nor submit material which has been written for you even with the consent of the person who has written it. It is vital to your intellectual training and development that you should undertake the research process unaided. Under Statute XI on University Discipline, all members of the University are prohibited from providing material that could be submitted in an examination by students at this University or elsewhere.

### **Auto-plagiarism**

You must not submit work for assessment that you have already submitted (partially or in full), either for your current course or for another qualification of this, or any other, university, unless this is specifically provided for in the special regulations for your course. Where earlier work by you is citable, ie. it has already been published, you must reference it clearly. Identical pieces of work submitted concurrently will also be considered to be auto-plagiarism.

### **What happens if I am suspected of plagiarism?**

The University regards plagiarism in examinations as a serious matter. Cases will be investigated and penalties may range from deduction of marks to expulsion from the University, depending on the seriousness of the occurrence. Even if plagiarism is inadvertent, it can result in a penalty. The forms of plagiarism listed above are all potentially disciplinary offences in the context of formal assessment requirements.

The regulations regarding conduct in examinations apply equally to the 'submission and assessment of a thesis, dissertation, essay, or other coursework not undertaken in formal examination conditions but which counts towards or constitutes the work for a degree or other academic award'. Additionally, this includes the transfer and confirmation of status exercises undertaken by graduate students. Cases of suspected plagiarism in assessed work are investigated under the disciplinary regulations concerning conduct in examinations. Intentional plagiarism in this context means that you understood that you were breaching the regulations and did so intending to gain advantage in the examination. Reckless, in this context, means that you understood or could be expected to have understood (even if you did not specifically consider it) that your work might breach the regulations, but you took no action to avoid doing so. Intentional or reckless plagiarism may incur severe penalties, including failure of your degree or expulsion from the university.

If plagiarism is suspected in a piece of work submitted for assessment in an examination, the matter will be referred to the Proctors. They will thoroughly investigate the claim and call the student concerned for interview. If at this point there is no evidence of a breach of the regulations, no further disciplinary action will be taken although there may still be an academic penalty. However, if it is concluded that a breach of the regulations may have occurred, the Proctors will refer the case to the Student Disciplinary Panel.

If you are suspected of plagiarism your College Secretary/Academic Administrator and subject tutor will support you through the process and arrange for a member of Congregation to accompany you to all hearings. They will be able to advise you what to expect during the investigation and how best to make your case. The [OUSU Student Advice Service](#) can also provide useful information and support.

### **Does this mean that I shouldn't use the work of other authors?**

On the contrary, it is vital that you situate your writing within the intellectual debates of your discipline. Academic essays almost always involve the use and discussion of material written by others, and, with due acknowledgement and proper referencing, this is clearly distinguishable from plagiarism.

The knowledge in your discipline has developed cumulatively as a result of years of research, innovation and debate. You need to give credit to the authors of the ideas and observations you cite. Not only does this accord recognition to their labours, it also helps you to strengthen your argument by making clear the basis on which you make it. Good citation practice gives your reader the opportunity to follow up your references, or check the validity of your interpretation.

### **Does every statement in my essay have to be backed up with references?**

You may feel that including the citation for every point you make will interrupt the flow of your essay and make it look very unoriginal. At least initially, this may sometimes be inevitable. However, by employing good citation practice from the start, you will learn to avoid errors such as sloppy paraphrasing or unreferenced quotation.

It is important to understand the reasons behind the need for transparency of source use. All academic texts, even student essays, are multi-voiced, which means they are filled with references to other texts. Rather than attempting to synthesise these voices into one narrative account, you should make it clear whose interpretation or argument you are employing at any one time (whose 'voice' is speaking).

If you are substantially indebted to a particular argument in the formulation of your own, you should make this clear both in footnotes and in the body of your text, before going on to describe how your own views develop or diverge from this influence.

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 help you learn how to avoid common errors. If you are undertaking a project or dissertation you should ensure that you have information on plagiarism and collusion. If in doubt about referencing, paraphrasing or plagiarism, ask your tutor.

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