

Getting organised

You can reclaim a lot of lost time if you can get yourself better organised. That includes having a comfortable, well-equipped **working space**; establishing a **simple filing system** so you can find the tools and the information you need when you need it; **staying informed** about things like deadlines, and who can help you if you miss them.

Working space

Ideally you would have a dedicated study space with access to all the materials you need and room for all your books, papers and equipment, so that you could leave your work at any time and come back to it undisturbed. Few people have that luxury, so you will probably need strategies for mobile study.

Everyone works differently, so the first thing you need to decide is what place will suit you best. You may work better at home or in your room where you have instant access to all your notes. Or you may find it easier to focus in the university library. Either way you need to think about:

- * comfort - it'll be more difficult to focus on work if, for instance, you're sitting at the wrong height for your computer screen, you're too cold or too hot to be comfortable, or can't get a glass of water.
- * space - you can save time moving stuff around by having enough space to spread out all you need in the first place.
- * appropriate resources - so if you're not working in the library, plan ahead to have the texts you need (photocopies if necessary), and keep spares of vital equipment like pens, note pads, printer cartridges and paper.



A rough guide to getting organised

Unless you are lucky enough to have a dedicated space to study, you will probably have to keep packing your work away, and maybe carrying at least some of it around with you. So having a filing system is essential so you can keep track of things.

The key is to make it simple - if you have lots of ring binders with colour-coded dividers, it'll be easy to find things, but you're less likely to file stuff away when you're tired. Experiment to find what system works best for you.

Here's an example of a simple filing system:

1.

Keep a shelf dedicated to study materials. Use it for box files, books, pens, paper etc.

2.	Have one box file for each course or module. Use it for notes, photocopies, handouts, journal articles, small books, etc. When the box file gets too full to find things easily, spend ten minutes going through it and throwing out anything you no longer need.
3.	Mark up a folder 'Current work' and use it to carry around whatever you're currently working on. Go through it at the end of the week and transfer anything you don't need on a daily basis to the appropriate box file.
4.	Pin copies of your weekly timetable and your termly work plan somewhere you will see them everyday (maybe above the kettle!). Add important phone numbers to the sheet (your dept office for queries about lecture times, the library to renew books etc) so all your useful info is in one place. Or, if you can, record all your useful information on your mobile phone so that you have it handy at all times and can edit easily when necessary.
5.	Use a social bookmarking tool like delicious to keep favourite websites easily accessible from any computer you happen to be working on. (Here's a list of social bookmarking sites.)

You can also **print this off as an A4 handout** as a reminder.

Staying informed

As well as keeping your own work organised, you will need to know about what other people have organised for you, including things like:

- * lecture and seminar times and locations
- * coursework deadlines
- * marking schemes
- * exams

Keep this kind of information transportable so you can add to or amend it when necessary (perhaps in a pocket planner, small notebook or diary, or on your mobile phone), and remember to go through it once a term and delete anything out of date.

Find out how your dept will let you know of any changes (by email? internal post? noticeboard? Blackboard or other VLE?) and check that regularly - it's annoying and a waste of time to trudge into campus through the rain for a lecture that's cancelled.

You also need to know what to do and who you can talk to if things go wrong. For instance, if you're going to miss a deadline should you contact your personal tutor, department secretary, or someone else? Do you have contact details for your Student Union advisers, Counselling, the Health Centre? It's better to find these things out in advance than wait till a crisis occurs.