

HE TRANSITION PACK

Study Skills

Levels and Expectations

Welcome to the start of your academic journey! Please see below a breakdown of what is expected of you at different levels throughout your course. Within undergraduate degrees, level 4, 5 and 6, reflect your first, second and third year. The information below provides a guide to the standards which should be met at each level.

What is expected at Level 4?

At level 4 you will be introduced to a specialist topic you have chosen to study.

- Introduction to referencing and in-text citations: this becomes standard practice from level 4.
- You will be expected to write in a 'critical' way and limit descriptive language.
- You will learn how to write essays and be introduced to alternative assignment types such as posters and presentations.
- You will be expected to ask relevant questions to assist you with your learning and knowledge building, for your chosen course.
- To be able to start prioritising and managing your time effectively by using online resources such as the [LRC Portal](#), Adult Support Mentor, LRC staff and your teaching staff.
- You will be expected to gather valid and reliable information in accordance with your assignment brief.
- You will learn about research methods.
- You will learn how to paraphrase and use direct quotations in your work to avoid plagiarism.

What is expected at Level 5?

At level 5, you will be expected to have gained valuable academic skills from level 4.

- You will be expected to be able to use problem solving skills to ensure you are following the assignment brief efficiently, managing your time effectively and accessing the resources available to you at NESCOL.
- You will be expected to have now learnt to think 'critically' from level 4 - this should be reflected within your work.
- You will use your tutor feedback in order to improve your next assignment.
- You will have learnt how to minimise descriptive writing, and you will have become more aware of the necessity of justifying your work. You may also come across alternative methods of assignments.

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Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is a type of support that covers the study-related costs you have because of a mental health problem, long-term illness or any other disability. It does not need to be paid back. This can be on its own or in addition to any student finance you get. The type of support and how much you get depends on your individual needs - not your household income (Gov.uk).

There are two ways to apply for DSA. The first is to apply via your Student Finance application.

1. Applying via Student Finance England:

When you apply for your student loan, during the application there will be a page which asks you if you would like to apply for DSA: <https://www.gov.uk/student-finance-register-login>.

If you would like to apply for DSA, you tick the box and continue with your finance application. At the end of the application, once submitted, you must attach any evidence to the DSA application section (found on your finance account), so the DSA can arrange an assessment.

2. Applying without student finance:

If you are not applying for student finance, you will need to print out and fill in the DSA1 form: [Disabled Students' Allowance application forms and notes for 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK](#)

Once filled in, please attach any evidence to support your application and either post, or email directly to:

Student Finance England
PO Box 210
Darlington
DL1 9HJ

Phone: 0300 100 0607
Email: dsa_team@slc.co.uk

Types of support you may be funded: The type of support you will receive will vary depending on your need, determined after your DSA assessment. There are four types of support (allowances):

- **Specialist equipment allowance** can include a laptop, printer, assistive technology such as certain apps that can make studying easier (app example) and hardware.
- **A non-medical helper allowance** can include specialist mentoring and tutoring, assistive technology and software training, specialist note-taking and a BSL interpreter.
- **General allowance** includes everyday stationery costs such as printer ink, printing, paper and other course-based stationery.
- **Travel allowance** can assist with any taxis/car mileage for anyone with chronic illness and disabilities, as well as any extra travel costs such as work placement modules.

Types of support DSA does not cover: the cost of medicines, course related costs that non-disabled students would be expected to pay for i.e., course textbooks and any costs of personal care that would ordinarily be provided by social services.

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Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)

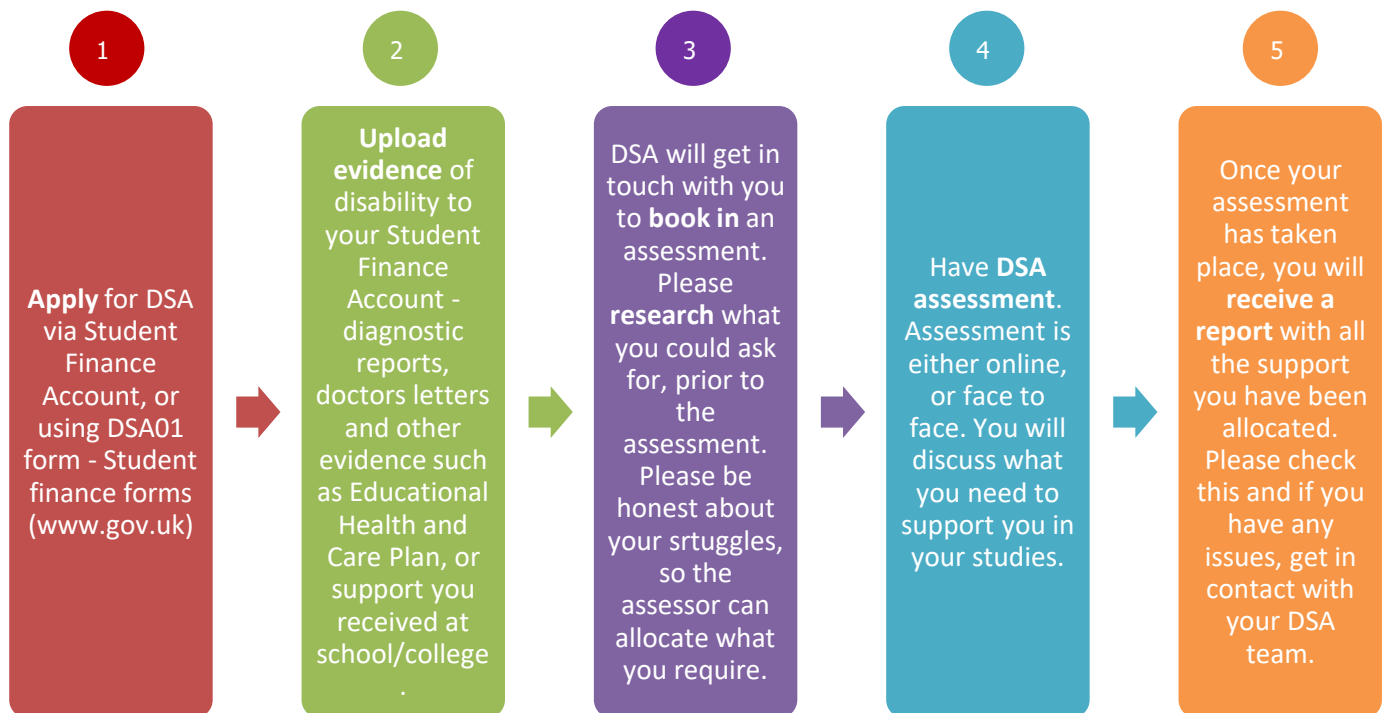
The 5 stages of DSA: Application, Evidence, Assessment, Confirmation and Report

To apply for DSA, you will have to meet the criteria set by the **Equality Act 2010** and **provide suitable evidence** of your disability:

"You're disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities."

For the majority of disabilities, this would be an up-to-date letter from your doctor or appropriate specialist.

If you have a specific learning difference (SpLD) such as dyslexia or dyspraxia, you will need a full educational psychologist's assessment produced by a HCPS registered psychologist or a Specialist Dyslexia Teacher with a current Practice Certificate for assessing students at Higher Education (HE).



For further information, email Donna Foster (Adult Support Mentor) at dfoster@nescot.ac.uk,

or go to: <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa>.

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Levels and Expectations

- At level 5, you would have built on your research skills from level 4 so you should be somewhat comfortable and experienced with accumulating relevant research from reputable sources ([LRC portal](#)) to support your writing.
- You will be able to write reports, literature reviews and conduct research projects.
- You will be expected to use academic, relevant and up to date sources of information to support your work.
- You will be expected to quote and paraphrase effectively.
- Your referencing and use of in-text citations should be relevant, accurate and in the correct format (Harvard).

What is expected at Level 6?

At level 6, you will be expected to use the skills you have accumulated over the past two levels to now produce a higher standard of work.

- A higher word count and expectations from the accredited university.
- A higher standard of academic writing, with critical thinking and analytical writing being common practice.
- Accurate and relevant usage of referencing and in-text citations should be standard practice in your work.
- Specialist topic knowledge and efficient research skills.
- Introduction to final year-project/dissertation and the research methods you will use to collect data.
- The ability to analyse your own ideas using relevant research.
- Preparing for employment, or post-graduate education.

What is expected at Level 7?

At level 7, you will be expected to be an independent student requiring minimal supervision from tutor and highly develop your knowledge and skills.

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Learning Resources Centre (LRC)

The [LRC](#) is an excellent place to study, work on assignments and carry out research. During term-time the LRC is open Monday to Thursday from 08:30 to 19:00 every day, on a Friday from 08:30 to 17:00 and on most Saturdays from 09:00 to 14:00. During college vacations the LRC is open Monday to Friday from 09:00 to 16:00.

The LRC features both a Welcome and a Help desk. LRC staff located at either desk will assist with enquiries and will support you to use computers and printers.

There are around 200 study spaces in the LRC and these are separated into areas for group and individual study. There is also a dedicated zone for HE students that has a variety of study spaces and PC workstations.

The LRC has 70 PCs and a bank of 60 Chromebooks available. All PCs are equipped with Windows 11 and are connected to multifunctional devices that can scan, print and photocopy in black & white and colour. Wi-Fi is available across the entire campus so you can also use your own laptops and mobile devices.

The LRC offers a comprehensive collection of print and electronic books, DVDs, online journal databases and other resources including video streaming. The [LRC Online Portal](#) contains reading lists and other subject specific online resources for every course which are accessible 24/7.

The LRC has a collection of 17,000 printed books covering all subjects. You may borrow up to ten items at any one time. Books can be borrowed for up to three weeks. Most items may be renewed or reserved. If an item that you need is not in stock you may request it to be purchased or borrowed from another library.

The LRC is fully accessible. There are two adjustable desks for use with wheelchairs, a disabled toilet and document magnifiers. Read&Write and other software to assist with dyslexia is available throughout the college. Many e-books come with accessibility settings and some e-journal articles have audio accompaniment.

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Learning Resources Centre (LRC)

The Learning Centre Manager and the Higher Education Support Mentor work closely with your lecturers and understand the research requirements for your projects. They are based in the LRC and you can have one-to-one support with either, in person or online, if you need assistance with DSA applications, academic study support, information literacy or digital skills.

E-learning facilitators can also be found in the LRC. They are VLE specialist and can support you with Google Classroom and digital queries.

When you start at College, you will attend an Information Literacy Skills Programme in the LRC. This programme has been created to provide you with the skills that you need to search for information in the LRC Online Portal, including the library catalogue and journal databases. The programme also covers how to avoid plagiarism and how to reference correctly. At Nescot College we use Harvard referencing system based on the latest guidance from [Cite Them Right Online](#), which we subscribe to.

Academic, study and digital skills workshops will also be delivered throughout the academic year.

[Student Finance](#) is also based in the LRC. The specialist financial support team can advise you on all the monetary aspects of coming to College.



For further information, email Cristina Ruiz de Asua (Learning Centre Manager) at cruizdeasua@nescot.ac.uk.

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Organisation skills

Finding some organisational techniques which work for you can help you to stay in control of your studies as your course progresses. Effective organisation can be broken down into practical elements such as planning your work, prioritising tasks and filing your notes away, but it also contains softer skills such as good communication and the ability to work with others. As with time management, different strategies work for different people. Try a few of these suggestions to build your skillset.

Key points

- When you are not focusing on specific work, try the two-minute rule for small tasks – if it can be completed in less than two minutes, just finish it. This avoids small tasks building up.
- Have an accountability partner – tell a peer or friend what you will have done and by when.
- Identify what stops you being organised – what changes can you make?
- Try 'temptation bundling'; combining a task that you dislike with one that you enjoy.
- Have daily and monthly plans.
- Recognise what goes well (for example, studying in a different place) and what to adapt.
- Try colour-coding your notes so that sections are easy to find later.
- Have everything you need ready when you start.
- Set finishing times for your sessions.
- Try to work for at least twenty minutes before you take a break.
- Prepare for lectures, so that you know what to expect and can ask questions.
- Be kind to yourself and re-adjust your plans if necessary.

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Study Skills

Organisation skills

Practice

- ✓ Activity: Note down some ideas from the [Six habits of highly organised people](#).
- ✓ Look through [this guide](#) about how to overcome procrastination. Which parts are helpful for you?
- ✓ How to be more organised in [11 easy steps](#).
- ✓ Learn from Tim Urban's TED talk (2016): [Tim Urban: Inside the mind of a master procrastinator](#)
- ✓ Note down some suggestions on how to get things done with the least effort from productivity author Graham Allcott: [Radio 1's Life Hacks - Adapt the World, Organisational Skills](#) (30 mins).

Further resources

- ✓ Caunt, J. (2022) *How to organize yourself: simple ways to take control, save time and work more efficiently*. 7th edn. KoganPage. [Shelved at 650.11 CAU](#)
- ✓ Cottrell, S. (2024) *The study skills handbook*. 6th edn. Palgrave Macmillan. [Shelved at 371.30821 COT](#)
- ✓ Institute for Academic Development (2025) *Ways to prioritise*. Available at: https://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/iad/Student_resources/Time/IAD_Ways_to_prioritise_CC_2025.pdf (Accessed: 9 July 2026).
- ✓ Williams, R. (2025) *The motivation mindset* [podcast which has several episodes about procrastination]. Available at: <https://www.risawilliams.com/motivationmindset.html> (Accessed: 9 July 2026).

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Study Skills

Time management

Effective time management skills are essential for students to be able to balance their non-college commitments with the demands of preparing for lectures and researching and writing assignments. Different strategies work for different people and even for different tasks; it is always worth trying a different approach or technique instead of relying on your usual approach. Many students find planners helpful and these are available in various formats. Some people prefer a paper diary or wall planner and written to-do list, while others prefer to have all their plans and tasks on their phone. Keeping a record of what is due and when means that you don't need to remember these facts as well as working on your tasks. If you are feeling overwhelmed, it is often helpful to break a large project into smaller segments, and if you are stuck on something, come back to it later on.

Key points

- Be realistic about how much time you have and how long things take.
- Make time to plan the day, week or month ahead.
- Include all your personal commitments in your planning.
- Know what you will be studying before you start.
- Build a time 'buffer' into your planning – allow 25% more time than you think you need; this builds in some flexibility for unforeseen events or times of demotivation.
- Prioritise your tasks.
- Be aware of when and where you study best, such as early morning or late at night and in the library or at home, in quietness or with background noise.
- Know what your distractions and obstacles are and ways to manage them.
- Include thinking time.
- Take breaks and include rewards and celebrations along the way.
- Adapt your plans if necessary – what can be dropped from the list or done differently?
- Use to-do lists, timers, alarms and/or mindmaps to help you.
- Include some "stealth study" – just five or ten minutes if longer times are difficult to plan (Cottrell, 2024, p. 143).
- Allow plenty of time for editing and re-drafting assignments.

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Study Skills

Time management

Practice

- ✓ Read [this article](#) about the three skills behind time management: awareness, arrangement and adaptation.
- ✓ Learn [how to prioritise your tasks](#).
- ✓ Understand more about why we procrastinate and how to overcome it by [watching this video](#).
- ✓ Work through some of the resources that accompany [The study skills handbook by Stella Cottrell](#). How are you spending your time now and how could that change?

Further resources

- ✓ BBC Learning English (2017) *Study skills: managing your time*. Available at: <https://youtu.be/JGr46kYMEQQ> (Accessed: 9 July 2026).
- ✓ Cottrell, S. (2024) *The Study skills handbook*. 6th edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. [Shelved at 371.30821 COT](#)
- ✓ The Study Space (2022) *Top time management tips for students*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuJpo8XnoA0> (Accessed: 9 July 2026).
- ✓ Open Learn (2025) *At a crossroads: navigating work and/or family alongside study*. <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/crossroads> (Accessed: 9 July 2026).
- ✓ University of Reading (2019) *Making more hours in the day*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wq3cGOBpMFo&list=PLZ4zuemgoY5rNQm8ZY1uOkxv7lcixHP0&index=2> (Accessed: 9 July 2026).

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Note taking

There are many ways of taking notes and different methods work for different people; it is also worth trying methods which are new to you, as they may suit a particular assignment. A two-stage approach is often helpful – first, note the main points, then revisit your files and add a summary, organise your notes and add your own thoughts as well. Know what you are looking for before you start reading.

Key points

- Don't try to write everything down – identify the main points and note any questions that you have, or other things to follow up on.
- Think about how the material is going to fit with your assignment, or whether you are reading to improve your general understanding of a topic.
- Try mind maps, pictures, tables or flow charts as well as lists or bullet points.
- Look for connections between sources and topics.
- Prepare in advance, so that you know what to expect in lectures or seminars.
- Use abbreviations, shapes and symbols to save time.
- Try using colour, either for coding or emphasis.
- Add your notes to the handouts, rather than duplicating the slides.
- Write the details for any sources so that you can reference them correctly.
- Make it clear as you write what is a direct quote and what are your own words as you will not remember afterwards.

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Study Skills

Note taking

Practice

- ✓ [The Basics of the Cornell note taking method](#): Many people find the Cornell method of taking notes helpful - your paper is divided so that about 2/3 is made into a section for notes on the subject and the remaining third for jotting down any questions you have, further things to look up, links between sources, relevance to the assignment etc. Leave a section across the bottom of the page for a summary of that topic.
- ✓ [Effective note-making - Reading and making notes](#), from the University of Reading. Learn how to "be meticulous and accurate".
- ✓ Learn the four principles behind critical note taking with [this short video](#) from the University of Reading (2019).
- ✓ Create your own version [of this critical reading form](#), from the University of Edinburgh (2025).

Further resources

- ✓ Cottrell, S. (2024) *The Study skills handbook*. 6th edn. Palgrave Macmillan. [Shelved at 371.30821 COT](#)
- ✓ Hopkins, D. and Reid, M. (2024) *The academic skills handbook: your guide to success in writing, thinking and communicating at university*. 2nd edn. Sage. [Shelved at 378.170281 HOP](#)
- ✓ Greetham, B. (2023) *How to write better essays*. 5th edn. Bloomsbury. [Shelved at 808.042 GRE](#)
- ✓ SkillsYouNeed: [Note-Taking from Reading](#) and [Note-Taking for Verbal Exchanges](#)
- ✓ Open University (2025) [Note-taking techniques](#)

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HE Glossary

Apply: Use a theory in a practical setting or relate it to another context.

Example: To what extent does the Pareto principle (80/20) apply to your way of working?

Analyse: Break into smaller elements and consider each of them.

Example: Analyse your current course module. What aspects are covered?

Argument: Reasons (including evidence) which support your view.

Example: Support your argument with evidence from your research

Assess: To consider something in order to make a judgement about it.

Example: Assess the benefits and limitations of your current time management strategies.

Bias: Underlying assumptions that prevent the presentation of an objective view.

Example: Consider any unintentional bias in your choice of reading material.

Coherent: Clearly written, with a logical structure.

Example: The student presented a coherent argument.

Communicate accurately: Convey information in a way that others understand it.

Example: Present your research in a way that communicates the results accurately to your peers.

Critical thinking: Understanding and questioning our thinking in order to improve our decisions.

Example: Critical thinking skills are highly valued in the workplace.

Discuss: Explain the subject in question, giving both viewpoints and their implications.

Example: Discuss the relative merits of tea and coffee in terms of their suitability as morning drinks.

Evaluate: Make considered judgements on the value, importance, or quality of your sources.

Example: Evaluate the implementation of a recent government policy in your sector.

Evidence: Elements from your reading and research that support your argument.

Example: This essay is well-supported with evidence from a broad range of sources.

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Study Skills

HE Glossary

Explain: Give details to make something clear.

Example: Research the forthcoming topic and explain it to the class in the next session.

Illustrate: Use selected examples which clarify your point.

Example: Illustrate with examples from your research.

Interpret: Explain the meaning and relevance of data collected or studied.

Example: The results could be interpreted in several other ways.

Justify: Provide supporting evidence for a claim, whilst also considering or recognising any other viewpoints and the strengths and limitations of other options.

Example: Justify your conclusions.

Present: Explain to others in a way that is understood by the audience.

Example: Present your findings to the class.

Reflect: Analyse what happened, why, and find ways to proceed differently in future.

Example: Reflect on your learning this term and plan changes for next term.

Review: Consider the research and give your judgement.

Example: The appeal committee reviewed the original decision.

State: Explain briefly and concisely.

Example: Please state why you are applying for this course.

Synthesise: "Combine different perspectives, aspects, reasoning or solutions to create something new." Cottrell, 2024, p. 46.

Example: A synthesised literature review shows how the material connects together.

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Academic writing

'Academic writing' is a way of referring to the type of writing which is required for university assignments. It might sound daunting at first; however, if it is new to you, it is a skill that can be learned and if you are familiar with it, your existing knowledge can be developed.

Academic writing means writing in a way that is formal, clear and accurate. It is writing that has a well-structured and supported argument, with a logical progression from the introduction to the conclusion. Writing should be objective and statements should be cautious, because academia is open to changes of opinion. Often, students are asked to evaluate and critically analyse their sources.

Key elements of academic writing

- **A formal tone** is expected; assignments should be written impersonally and without slang or colloquialisms. Words should be written in full, such as cannot and is not, instead of abbreviated into can't and isn't.
- **The writing is clear**, meaning it is precise and unambiguous. Jargon should be avoided and sentences should not be too long. Simple words are used in preference to unnecessarily complicated ones and any unnecessary words are removed.
- **Assignments should be accurate**, free from factual errors, typo and grammatical mistakes.
- **Arguments should be well-supported**, having evidence for each point raised and the evidence cited and referenced in the correct format.
- **Writing should be objective**, examining both sides of an argument, and should aim to be unbiased.
- **Sources should be evaluated**, not just described, with judgements made about what to use and why.
- **Critical analysis is applied**, meaning an evaluation of the arguments made by the authors you have read, examining their sources and methods, comparing authors with other authors and synthesising your research into your own idea for your assignment. Find out more about critical thinking on our [Critical analysis](#) page.

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Academic writing

Practice

- ✓ Notice how the sources you are reading are written – what makes them easy to read, how do they introduce a subject and lead on to new points? What is the style of writing? Is there anything that makes them difficult to read?
- ✓ Try this [free course](#) from the Open University.
- ✓ Evaluate written assignments for yourself: [Checklist \(p. 327\)](#) from *The study skills handbook* by Stella Cottrell.

Further resources

- ✓ Cottrell, S. (2024) *The Study skills handbook*. 6th edn. Palgrave Macmillan. [Shelved at 371.30821 COT](#)
- ✓ Day, T. (2018) *Success in academic writing*. 2nd edn. Palgrave. [Shelved at 808.042 DAY](#)
- ✓ Gillet, A. (2026) *Using English for Academic Purposes* [UEfAP](#)
- ✓ Godfrey, J. (2022) *Writing for university*. 3rd edn. Palgrave. [Shelved at 808.066378 GOD](#)
- ✓ Greetham, B. (2023) *How to write better essays*. 5th edn. Bloomsbury. [Shelved at 808.042 GRE](#)
- ✓ Kirton, B. (2012) *Brilliant academic writing*. Pearson. [Shelved at 808.042 KIR](#)
- ✓ Peck, J. and Coyle, M. (2005) *Write it right: a handbook for students*. Palgrave Macmillan. [Shelved at 808.066 PEC](#)
- ✓ Suggestions for writing clearly: [The Study Space: Multimedia: tricks of the writer's trade](#)
- ✓ Grammar and punctuation: [Why improve your understanding of grammar and punctuation? \(bris.ac.uk\)](#)
- ✓ Academic Phrasebank: [University of Manchester, suggested opening phrases for academic writing](#)

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Acting on feedback

A normal part of learning is that our progress does not go in a straight line. Ups and downs, zigzags and spirals are experienced by almost everybody. Feedback from tutors is usually a combination of comments on what has been done well and suggestions for academic improvement; addressing these recommendations can help your future assignments to get higher marks. Typical developmental comments include: the work is too descriptive, or needs to demonstrate a wider range of reading, or the structure could be improved, or the referencing is inaccurate. If you receive comments like these, you are not alone, and these are all academic skills that can be developed. You can find assistance in the LRC or from the Adult Support Mentor; tutors may recommend this as well, in which case, please do not hesitate to contact us as we will be happy to help you with your studies.

Try to keep things in perspective by noticing the positive comments too, and acknowledge what is going well. As you act on the feedback, recognise that your work is getting stronger.

Key points

- Read the comments when you are in the right frame of mind, but as soon as possible in case you have any questions about them.
- Make sure you understand the comments and contact your tutor if necessary.
- If you don't agree with the comments, contact your tutor.
- Reflect on your work; what could you change in your approach?
- Personalise your learning – do the same comments keep coming up?
- Focus on at least one thing to improve next time.
- Think about developing your knowledge, rather than getting higher marks.
- Recognise what has improved in the next assignment and that you have progressed.
- Allow time to improve your first draft (five drafts are recommended by Greetham (2023), each one focusing on a different aspect, such as structure or tone).

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Acting on feedback

Practice

- ✓ Try this activity from BBC Learning English: [Course: Go The Distance / Unit 9 / Session 3 / Activity 1](#)
- ✓ Read this article by Stone and Heen published in Harvard Business Review, about why almost everyone struggles to receive feedback: [Find the Coaching in Criticism \(hbr.org\)](#)
- ✓ Read this page from the University of London Writing Centre (UCL): [Respond to Feedback](#). Examples of feedback are given, and advice on how to act on the sample comments.
- ✓ [What do tutors mean? Interpreting Feedback](#) (UoG) is another breakdown of frequently received comments.

Further resources

- ✓ Dweck, C. (2017) *Mindset*. Robinson. [Shelved at 153.8 DWE](#)
- ✓ Greetham, B. (2023) *How to write better essays*. 5th edn. Bloomsbury. [Shelved at 808.042 GRE](#)
- ✓ Hirsch, J. (2017) *The feedback fix: dump the past, embrace the future, and lead the way to change*. Rowman and Littlefield. [Shelved at 371.272 HIR](#)
- ✓ Neville, C. (2009) *How to improve your assignment results*. Open University Press. [Shelved at 808.066 NEV](#)
- ✓ Stone, D. and Henn, S (2019) *Thanks for the feedback: the science and art of receiving feedback well, even when it is off base, unfair, poorly delivered, and frankly, you're not in the mood*. Penguin Business. [Shelved at 153.68 STO](#)
- ✓ Staffordshire University (2025) [Acting on feedback](#) factsheet
- ✓ [Understanding feedback](#), from Imperial College London
- ✓ [Using feedback from your tutor: Strategic study techniques](#), from The Open University

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