

# Academic Culture

## 1

## The transition to higher education

At the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- identify common challenges for students in the early stages of higher education
- offer useful advice to students

### Task 1 Identifying challenges

The purpose of this task is to allow students the freedom to talk about what has been difficult for them personally and to share this with other students who may have had similar problems. It may be that it is the non-academic aspects of the transition from secondary to higher education that have caused them the most difficulty.

#### 1.1 Small group work

Encourage students to find more than one challenge for each photo.

##### Possible answers:

- adapting to life away from home/cooking
- organizing one's own time/doing research/writing essays or reports/becoming an independent learner
- writing exams/attending lectures
- adapting to life away from home/making new friends/managing study-life balance

#### 1.2 Individual work

Encourage students to add their own ideas about other challenges.

##### Answers:

Answers will vary from student to student.

#### 1.3 Pair work/Classwork

Encourage students to give reasons for their choices.

##### Answers:

Answers will vary from student to student.

### Task 2 Offering advice

#### 2.1 Individual work

Students follow instructions in the Course Book.

This task offers the opportunity to review language of similarity, difference and degree. You could provide your students with sentence starters to use for the task, e.g.:

We are fairly alike because ...

The main difference between us is ...

The two of us are different as ...

##### Answers:

Answers will vary from student to student.

#### 2.2 Pair work

Students follow instructions in the Course Book.

Alternatively, Task 2.2 could be assigned as a piece of writing, with advice for each problem being written on separate pieces of paper. These could form a wall display.

##### Possible answers:

- Identify blocks in your schedule for self-study. Use a diary to note the deadlines for all assignments. Think about the process of producing the piece of written work. Break the process down into steps, e.g.:
  - analyze the topic
  - read around, making notes
  - plan
  - arrange a meeting with your instructor to discuss the plan
  - first draft
  - get feedback
  - second draft
  - proofread
  - estimate the amount of time needed for each step, and plan the time backwards from the deadline
- Use the course reading material to help extend vocabulary. Keep a vocabulary record that includes information on meaning, pronunciation, collocation and grammar of words and phrases.
- Read course outlines instructors and program handbooks carefully. Talk to tutors about course requirements and their expectations of your work. Ask other students if they can show you examples of "successful" work.
- Prepare carefully for seminars by reading recommended texts and reviewing lecture notes. Show that you are participating in seminars, even if you feel too daunted to speak initially, by using active body language. Try to speak early on in the seminar. Make your instructor aware if you are having problems.

## Task 3 Asking for help

Students' concerns may range from practical problems, e.g., opening a bank account and finding suitable accommodation, to more complex ones, e.g., feeling homesick and encountering racism. To set the tone for this task, it might be useful to initiate the discussion by asking students to think about a time in the past when they shared a personal problem with a friend, and to consider how they felt, how the friend reacted, whether the discussion had a successful outcome, and what factors made the outcome successful or otherwise.

### 3.1 Pair work

Ask the pairs to identify several common issues. Examples of difficulties might include poor time management or difficulties encountered in a particular course. Encourage students to think about appropriate ways of discussing the issue with an academic advisor. If helpful, supply students with a list of points to reflect on, e.g.:

- Should you arrange a meeting with your advisor in advance, and if so, how?
- In the meeting, how long should initial pleasantries last?
- To what extent should you express your problem directly?
- How can you signal to your advisor that you are taking the advice in?

It might be worth mentioning the following points, if they don't arise in the discussion.

- It is a good idea to make an appointment with your advisor in advance, e.g., send an email briefly outlining the problem and requesting a meeting. Alternatively, check your advisor's office hours.
- It is important to recognize that the advisor is, in all likelihood, very busy. This means that there may only be a minute or two of pleasantries at the beginning of the meeting, after which the student needs to state the problem and provide any necessary background information.
- The advisor may refer the student on to someone else. This does not necessarily mean the advisor is lazy or uninterested; it may be that the institution employs other specialists to deal with the type of problem the student is experiencing.
- It is a good idea to thank your advisor at the end of the meeting.

### 3.2 Pair work

If possible, ask pairs to record their role-play. The pairs can then form small groups and play their recordings to each other within the group. The group can then evaluate the extent to which the role-play followed the criteria for a successful meeting they established in Task 3.1. Individual meetings with staff worry many students. If you think this is the case for your students, you may wish to extend the role-play.

## 2

## Expectations of higher education institutions

At the end of this unit, students will:

- be more aware of the expectations about teaching and learning in higher education institutions

## Task 1 General expectations

### 1.1 Individual work/Group work

Lead in by eliciting what expectations students have about lectures (or assessments/study-life balance). Then ask why these expectations may be disappointed.

**Answers:**

- D
- F – Students should check past exams.
- T – In many American institutions, the pass mark is 60%, and a mark of 90%–100% is equal to a 4.0 GPA in many cases.
- F
- F – Extracurricular activities are usually of great importance in student life.
- D – Students should check course outlines and program handbooks.
- D – It is common for students in North America to leave home in order to attend university.
- F – This would be unusual.
- D – Students should check course outlines and program handbooks.
- T – Generally speaking, only about the top 1%–2% are likely to graduate *summa cum laude*.

Students should be encouraged to check which of the above are true for their (future) institution of study as there is likely to be some variation.

### 1.2 Pair work

Students follow instructions in the Course Book.

**Answers:**

Answers will depend on students' expectations.

## Task 2 Expectations of professors

### 2.1 Pair work

Students follow instructions in the Course Book.  
Don't provide answers at this point, as these are covered by Task 2.2.

### 2.2 Pair work

Students follow instructions in the Course Book.

#### Answers:

A professor would be expected to:

- a. teach classes relevant to the subject – if they are uninteresting to the student, maybe he or she is in the wrong course.
- b. supply handouts – these are often made available on the web.
- e. give and mark assignments, though in many cases a teaching assistant may do the marking.
- g. generally, professors know and use students' first names, but this can depend on the size of the class.
- h. generally, this is true, but it is always a good idea to observe other students' behavior if you are unsure.

## Task 3 Expectations of students

### 3.1 Pair work

Encourage students to add their own ideas.

#### Answers:

#### students are expected to ...

- a. Attend all classes punctually.
- b. Let the professor know if they are going to be absent.
- c. Take notes during class.
- d. Read around the subject matter of the class.
- e. Participate in seminar discussions and answer questions.
- f. Give presentations.
- g. Use the library for research.
- h. Participate in group and teamwork activities.

#### students aren't expected to ...

- i. Help the professor by cleaning the board or carrying books.
- j. Speak to the professor if they have a personal problem.
- k. Join a university club or society.
- l. Get a part-time job to help with finances.
- m. Buy small presents at the end of the semester to thank the professor.

## Task 4 Critical incidents

Lead in by pointing out that, like much academic English vocabulary, the adjective *critical* can have more than one meaning. Give students some sentences to demonstrate possible differences in meaning, e.g.:

1. My instructor was critical of my argument and suggested I look for better evidence to support my view (i.e., expressing an opinion that something is bad).
2. The peace talks have entered a critical phase (i.e., difficult to handle as a small mistake might result in a much bigger problem).
3. After the car crash, his condition was critical for over a week. After this period, he was moved from intensive care into an ordinary ward (i.e., dangerously ill).

Ask students to read the examples of critical incidents in Task 4.1 and decide which meaning of *critical* is being used in the term *critical incidents*. (Meaning 2 in the above examples.)

### 4.1 Pair work

Students follow instructions in the Course Book.

#### Answers:

- a. 2. Apologizing at the end of the lecture and giving a suitable excuse.
1. This might be appropriate behavior if a student is late for a seminar that involves a relatively small group of people.
- b. 4. You can still see your parents in the evening.
- c. 1. Serious illness is usually considered mitigating circumstances if a student can provide a doctor's certificate.
- d. 3. Your instructor probably suspects you of plagiarism. This would be considered a serious incident.

## 3 Time management

At the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- identify factors involved in good time management
- analyze their own time-management skills and learn how to improve them

### Task 1 What is time management?

#### 1.1 Individual work/Pair work

To lead in, ask students how they would behave in the following situation:

A fellow student has invited you to his/her place for the first time to have a meal at 7 p.m. next Monday.

- What time would you arrive?
- Would you make any preparations? If so, what?
- When would you start making preparations?

Students follow instructions in the Course Book, and then compare their answers with a partner's.

#### Answers:

c and e

#### 1.2 Small group work

Ask students to revisit the remaining statements, asking them to alter them to provide more good advice on managing time.

#### Answers:

Possible changes to the other statements might be:

Time management is ...

- balancing the quality of the assignments submitted and the time available in which to complete them.
- managing your time and tasks in such a way as to maximize your learning opportunities.
- balancing social activities and study before and during the exam period.
- organizing your time on a day-to-day basis so that you get sufficient sleep.
- adding your deadlines and appointments to a calendar to help you remember them.

### Task 2 Importance of time management

#### 2.1 Individual work

As a lead-in, discuss the diagram with your students, eliciting which are examples of good and bad consequences. Then ask students to add some of their own ideas.

#### Answers:

In terms of good consequences, possible answers include having time for other activities and not feeling stressed about impending deadlines.

#### 2.2 Pair work

Ask students to compare their ideas with a partner's, encouraging them to explore the ways in which their ideas are similar and different.

### Task 3 Improve your time management

Before students complete this task, it may be useful to discuss the importance of being realistic about their timetables. If the timetable is not based on accurate information, it will quickly become unfeasible.

#### 3.1 & 3.2 Individual work/Pair work

To encourage students to offer advice and suggestions to each other on their timetables, it might help to give them some sentence beginnings, e.g.:

Have you thought about ...

Maybe you could ...

One thing that you could think about is ...

## 4

**Philosophy of teaching and learning**

At the end of this unit, students will be more aware of:

- what constitutes good teaching
- what is involved in learning a subject

**Task 1 A good teacher?**

As a lead-in, focus students' attention on the visuals and elicit which teacher students think would be a good one and why.

**1.1 Pair work**

Ask students to broaden their discussions to encompass their ideal teacher. Emphasize the need to justify their opinions, eliciting useful language for giving reasons if necessary at the start of the activity.

**1.2 Individual work/Pair work**

Ask students to work individually, ranking the characteristics. Then put them into pairs to explain their rankings.

The activity could be extended into a pyramid discussion, with pairs having to decide on their top three characteristics and then pairs of pairs doing the same, and so on until there is a whole-class discussion.

Alternatively, another extension might be to ask students to explain their top three ranking characteristics in writing.

**Answers:**

Answers will vary from student to student.

(There are no set answers here as students are asked to give their opinions. In North America, characteristics of a good teacher would probably include a, c, g, j and ideally i.)

**Task 2 The good student****2.1 Classwork**

Focus students' attention on the visuals and elicit what activities the various students are engaged in and how these activities are good for study.

**Answers:**

Answers will vary from student to student.

**2.2 Individual work/Pair work**

Like Task 1.2 in this unit, the activity could be extended to a pyramid discussion.

**Answers:**

Answers will vary from student to student.

(In North America, answers b, c, e, f, and j are often considered to be characteristics of good students. As good students progress through their program of study, however, they will come closer to achieving a, g, and i.)