Gaining a good degree

Your degree grade is important for your future employment as you will be in competition with other graduates from various institutions. A 1st or 2:1 degree shows that you are capable of critical thinking and this level of degree opens up the opportunity for further study at Master or Doctoral levels. Degree classifications of 2:2 or 3rd demonstrate that your ability to think critically requires further development.

Learning at university

At university you are gaining skills that are required in graduate level employment. You will be learning to work both independently and as part of a team. You will be expected to make decisions about what to include in your assignments and what to omit based upon the brief and learning outcomes. You need to learn to stand on your own two feet and make decisions for yourself, reducing your reliance upon your tutors.

Skills and qualities required:

1. **Develop a professional attitude**
   This means treating your degree like a job. If you are a full-time student, you should be working around 50 hours a week on your degree. Students who attend lectures do better than those who do not, so turn up on time every day and prepare for your lectures.

2. **Prepare for your lectures just as you would for a work meeting**
   Use the core reading texts provided by your tutor in your module handbook to prepare for your lectures. Read a related chapter to get an overview of the topic of the lecture. If you have a prior knowledge about the content of the lecture you are attending, then you can engage with it more critically and ask questions to increase your understanding and correct any misconceptions.

3. **Learn to search for academically acceptable resources (facts not fiction)**
   During your first few weeks visit the library resources pages. Make sure you know who your subject librarian is and make sure you understand how to find suitable information to use in your assignments. Attend online workshops and learn about referencing and how to avoid plagiarism: not understanding this can lead to a poor degree grade.

4. **Understand how to approach your assignments**
   Discover who your academic skills tutor for study skills is. Learn how to start an assignment so that you are providing the right information. Read about the different assignment structures: essays, reports, presentations and posters and so on. If you are not sure what you are being asked to do, make use of the online academic study skills resources and don't be afraid to ask for help. Asking for help indicates that you are aware of your capabilities and have the confidence to develop your skills.

5. **Produce professional written work**
   The University will expect professional, researched, and referenced work. Degree-level work should not contain spelling errors, grammar issues or non-academic (or informal) phraseology. You will need to learn to proofread your work. That means reading though, redrafting, rewriting, and marking your own work to ensure that the requirements of your brief, learning outcomes, and marking criteria have been met. Most importantly does your work make sense to a reader.
6. **Develop your IT skills**

There are a range of software and tools available to help you in your studies, and the university can help you to develop your skills to make full use of these. This might include creating documents and presentations, utilising tools to help you to plan your work and using software to create surveys, analyse data and much more. The help is available, but you need to assess your own needs and access the support.

**Self-directed learning and group work**

- **Plan your time**
  Manage your work on a wall planner as this will help you to see when work is due to be handed in. Sometimes assignment deadlines can fall in the same week or even on the same day. A planner not only enables you to keep track of what you need to do but also, it helps you to prioritise your work. Trying to work ahead of schedule means that if you hit a problem you will have time to ask for help and rearrange your timetable.

- **Build relationships with tutors and peers**
  Engage with your subject and impress your tutors by asking questions and joining in discussions. Take an active role in your learning and you will enjoy it more. Get to know your peers and form study groups to share knowledge and understanding. Remember at university you are not in competition therefore by working with your fellow students you can develop both your criticality and your understanding of the different ways to view and approach issues. You will develop an understanding about the different ways people think and learn.

- **Group work**
  You may be asked to work in groups on your course, for example in workshops, labs or as part of a group assessment. Establish positive and supportive working relationships, communicate clearly, keep on track with your contributions and responsibilities, and share strengths and knowledge. Group work enables you to develop many ‘soft skills’ such as diplomacy. These skills are much sort after by employers.

**Find a work / life balance**

a) **Enjoy your learning**
  You are studying a subject that you find interesting so this should not be viewed as a chore. Enjoy the academic and the practical and expand your knowledge and understanding.

b) **Make new friends**
  Plan to take advantage of the facilities the university has to offer. Try out new things. Join clubs and societies. These steps will help you to make the most of your university experience and to meet new people outside your subject area.

c) **A problem shared is a problem halved**
  Maintain a good work/life balance and reward yourself for getting things done on time. If you are struggling, talk to your personal tutor or make use of the academic skills and student support services available at the university.
University resources

Support for students
Spend time finding out what is available in terms of support and take advantage of this. For instance, become familiar with the library and with library online resources. Use the Careers Network to help you to work towards your goals from the start. Practice using Blackboard as it contains information provided by your tutors about your programme of study.

Module information
Module handbooks contain information about your modules such as learning outcomes and assessment criteria, which will help you to understand what your tutors want you to achieve in order to attain high marks and be successful in your studies. Refer to these on an ongoing basis as well as making use of the module descriptors that can be found on eVision. These link the learning outcomes to the different assignments and provide information about the weighting of each piece of work you undertake.

A final note
Finally, work hard and play well by making the most of your time and the opportunities the university has to offer.

Have a great time and good luck