

Succeeding at University in New Zealand

**An Academic Guide for
International Students**

Academic Skills Centre
University of Canterbury

www.academicskills.canterbury.ac.nz

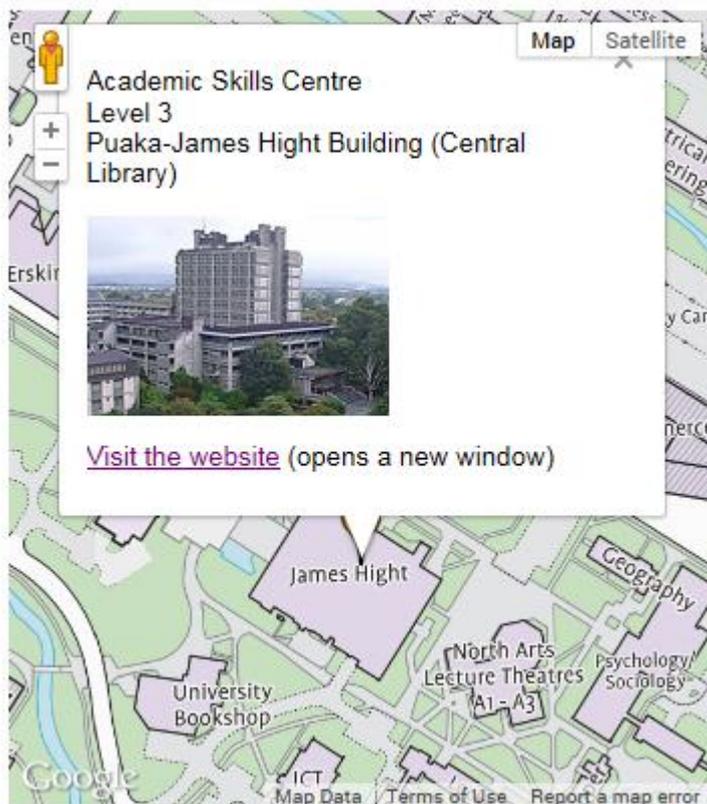


Academic Skills Centre

The Academic Skills Centre (ASC) is a free advisory service for University of Canterbury (UC) students at all levels, from first year through to PhD. ASC provides support with academic writing, speaking and study strategies to help students succeed.

We offer workshops, one-to-one consultations and resources on the following topics:

- essay and report writing
- reading and writing skills
- speaking and listening skills
- grammar, punctuation and style
- thesis writing
- presentation skills
- referencing
- time management
- note-taking
- exam revision and study skills



Contact the Academic Skills Centre

Level 3, Puaka-James Hight
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Haere Mai – Welcome

Studying in a foreign country is both a challenging and rewarding experience. This booklet contains information about some of the expectations and requirements of the New Zealand university system. Understanding the differences between New Zealand universities and those in your home country is the first step towards succeeding in your studies.

Getting Started

Be prepared for a culture shock. *Culture shock* refers to the experience of being in a culture which is different from your own. Never assume things will be the same in New Zealand as they are at home. Some aspects of studying in New Zealand may be familiar to you, but others may seem quite strange. Accept that it will take time for you to adjust to a new way of doing things, and ask lots of questions.

UC has a diverse campus, with students and staff from all over the world. Along with English, Te Reo Māori (the indigenous language of Aotearoa New Zealand) is an official language. You will notice many of the signs and instructions around campus are in both Māori and English, and some people may greet you in Māori as well.

Develop a social and support network. There may be times when being away from family, friends and your own culture is difficult. Developing support networks takes effort: you need to work at it; it won't just happen. If you need help, be honest about what you're experiencing and ask for assistance. UC has many support services to help you with accommodation, health concerns, relationship problems, and much more (see back page).

Keep your long-term goals in mind. University study can be challenging. You may need to spend long hours studying, and you may experience stress and pressure trying to keep up with your workload and meet deadlines. At these stressful times, it is important to remind yourself why you are at university and what you want to achieve in the long term. This will help to motivate you and make the difficult times seem worthwhile.

Studying overseas is both challenging and rewarding.
Make the most of every opportunity.

Be prepared for independent study. University study in New Zealand may be more independent than you are used to. You are expected to do a lot for yourself, from choosing your own courses to taking responsibility for your own learning, attendance and assessment. The ASC can help you develop strategies for independent learning.

Find a balance. It is important to look after your health and well-being and to maintain relationships with your peers. Manage your time so you can exercise, eat well, enjoy the beautiful New Zealand landscape, and spend time with new friends in addition to working on your studies.



Understanding New Zealand University Culture

University culture refers to the set of traditions, expectations and ways of doing things that make a university different from another institution or learning establishment. New Zealand university culture may be different from university cultures in other countries. Below are some common questions about university culture in New Zealand and their answers.

What will my classes be like?

Undergraduate students will have a combination of lectures, tutorials and labs depending on the subjects they are studying.

The **lecture** is the primary mode of transmitting knowledge. Lectures can range in size from 20-30 students up to several hundred, depending on the course. Students usually do not talk in lectures, unless the lecturer asks them a question or asks them for questions. Most lecturers do not appreciate students talking to one another during lectures. Make sure your phone is switched off or in silent mode during the lecture.

Tutorials, labs and workshops are opportunities for participation and discussion. Although students are not usually graded on their participation, there is an expectation that if you attend you will contribute. Be respectful of other students and your teacher, but do not be afraid to voice your opinions.

Postgraduate lectures and seminars usually have smaller numbers of students and you will probably be expected to participate more actively than in an undergraduate lecture.

Attendance is usually not monitored, although in some courses attendance may be compulsory (check with your lecturer). Typically, you are responsible for your own attendance.

Students are often surprised by the amount of **reading** they are expected to complete. It is important to keep up to date with your reading, as you will probably need it to complete your assessment. You will often be expected to complete some reading as preparation for a lecture or tutorial.

What will my teachers be like?

You will have different kinds of teachers during your time at UC. **Lecturers** are usually academic staff who conduct research and are experts in their field. **Tutors, teaching assistants (TAs) and lab demonstrators** are often postgraduate students completing research to become experts in their field.

The relationship between lecturers/supervisors and students is usually relatively informal. Although the lecturer has more knowledge on the subject, lecturer and student are of equal status. Lecturers are often called by their first names. Even so, it is always important to be respectful of your lecturer. Treat your lecturer or supervisor like a more-experienced colleague.

In some cultures the teacher is always right: teachers cannot be contradicted and their job is to provide students with the answers. At UC teachers will expect you to come up with your own answers and solve problems yourself. Sometimes students may even question their lecturer's or supervisor's



ideas. If you do disagree with your lecturer, do so in a respectful and polite way, and make sure you have evidence to support your ideas.

Most lecturers can be contacted via email and have regular office hours during term time so you can meet with them in person. Keep in mind that your lecturers are busy people, but never feel too intimidated to approach them if you need to discuss something.

What sorts of assessment will I have?

Depending on their subjects, undergraduates may have some combination of the following **assessment types**: essays, reports, other written assignments, group projects, tests, exams, posters, and oral presentations. Postgraduates will often complete an extended piece of research in the form of a thesis or dissertation, either in addition to or instead of shorter assignments. Different kinds of assignments have different requirements, and these may not be the same as they are at home. The ASC can help you to understand the requirements of your assignment, or ask your lecturer or tutor for clarification.

The main method of assessing learning at university is **analysis and application of information**, not memorisation. Assessments do not simply involve listing facts you learn in your course; rather you will be expected to evaluate and apply complex ideas in different contexts. The ASC can help you to develop your critical thinking skills and understand what is expected of you in your assessment.

It is not usually acceptable to express personal opinions without supporting evidence in your academic writing. You need to remain objective and your opinions need to be supported with references to appropriate source material (see “Academic Integrity” on the next page). However, you may encounter exceptions to this rule, so ask your lecturer if you are unsure.

It is your responsibility to hand in your assessments on time. No one will check up on you if you do not. If you need an extension for an assignment, you must discuss this with your lecturer *before* the due date.



Academic Integrity: Plagiarism and Referencing

Academic integrity is based on the notion that ideas belong to the individual or group of individuals who first had those ideas. In the same way that physical property can be owned by individuals, knowledge is a type of intellectual property. At New Zealand universities we acknowledge others' ideas to avoid being dishonest by pretending someone else's work is our own. Not acknowledging another author's ideas in your writing is equivalent to hanging a painting by another artist on your wall and claiming that you painted it yourself.

There are other reasons besides moral and ethical ones for identifying where the ideas that inform your writing came from. When you engage in academic scholarship you are taking part in a conversation that involves a lot of other people working in the same or similar areas, and acknowledging others demonstrates your awareness that you are just one part of a much bigger intellectual exchange. Clearly identifying others' research in your writing also enables readers to find that information if they wish to expand their own knowledge. If you are completing a piece of writing for assessment, acknowledgement shows your marker that you have read widely on your topic and helps you to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the material.

Plagiarism means using someone else's ideas without proper acknowledgement. It is considered dishonest practice and can result in penalties. **Referencing** is the process we use to acknowledge other people's ideas in our writing, in order to avoid plagiarism. Notions of what counts as plagiarism can vary between countries so it is important to be aware of expectations in New Zealand.

Plagiarism can take a variety of forms, including:

- copying an entire essay, article, website or other source and submitting it as your own work.
- copying a section of an essay, article, book, website or other source and submitting it as your own work.
- copying sentences or paragraphs (or making only minor changes to sentences or paragraphs) from another author *without using quotation marks and without acknowledging the source*.
- copying sentences or paragraphs (or making only minor changes to sentences or paragraphs) from another author *without using quotation marks but with acknowledgement of the source*.
- putting another author's ideas into your own words *without acknowledging the source*.
- submitting the same assignment, or part of the same assignment, or very similar assignments more than once for the same course or different courses (known as *self-plagiarism*).
- submitting an assignment which has been produced in collaboration with another person or other people as your own independent work without your teacher's approval (known as *collusion*).

It is important to realise that plagiarism can be unintentional. If you are unsure whether or not something constitutes plagiarism, check with your lecturer or an ASC learning advisor before you submit your assignment.

The ASC provides resources on referencing and avoiding plagiarism. Alternatively, talk to your lecturer, tutor or teaching assistant.



Students with English as an Additional Language

Studying in New Zealand can be especially challenging if English is not your first language. Meeting the minimum English language requirements for university entry (e.g. IELTS) may not necessarily mean your English is good enough for all contexts and circumstances you will encounter at university. Non-native English speakers are expected to continue improving their English while they are enrolled at university. You need to make time for regular independent English language study in addition to your degree study. Below are some tips for advancing your English.

7 Ways to Improve your English

- 1. Get a good dictionary.** You need a good English dictionary in addition to a dictionary that translates words from your first language. A good dictionary will tell you what a word means, how to spell and pronounce it, what part of speech it is, and how to use it. Try the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) or the *Collins English Dictionary*. Be wary of online dictionaries (unless it is the online version of a good print dictionary, e.g. OED online).
- 2. Speak English as much as possible.** Talk with native English speakers on a regular basis and participate during class discussions to help improve your language and confidence. When you are with friends who speak the same first language as you, dedicate a period of time for speaking English, e.g. speak English for the first 15 minutes of the conversation, then change to your first language if you need to.
- 3. Write something in English every day.** This does not have to be academic writing, but could be a diary about what you did today, a text message to a friend, or even a note to remind yourself of something.
- 4. Read for language.** Notice how language is used in academic books and articles. Read for content the first time, but then read again for specific language structures. For example, if you know you need to work on prepositions, circle all the prepositions in a text and try to figure out how and why the writer is using them. Use a dictionary to help you.
- 5. Keep a vocabulary notebook.** Write down new words you encounter while reading, along with the definition (from a dictionary), the part of speech (noun, verb, etc.), and how the word is used in a sentence. Make sure you order the entries in some way that is meaningful to you. This could be alphabetical, by part of speech, or by topic (for words that are important to a particular subject).
- 6. Attend ASC workshops.** We offer workshops to help students improve their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Visit www.academickills.canterbury.ac.nz for more information.
- 7. Meet with an ASC Learning Advisor.** You can book a one-to-one consultation with a learning advisor who can help you with grammar, sentence structure and punctuation, as well as assignment structure and understanding assessment requirements. Make sure you book in advance to give yourself plenty of time before your assignment is due.



Additional Resources and Support

UC Student Development Team

The Student Development Team deals with queries and concerns relating to wellbeing and success. Their advisors can help you to settle into the university environment and provide you with strategies for overcoming problems and becoming more involved in university life. They can also help you to understand university policies and processes.

Phone: (03) 364 2350

Email: studentdevelopment@canterbury.ac.nz

Website: <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/support>

UC Health Centre

The Health Centre provides medical, counselling and related services to UC students.

Phone: (03) 364 2402

Website: www.canterbury.ac.nz/healthcentre

UC Security

General Security enquiries: (03) 364 2888

Emergencies: 0800 823 637

UC General Enquiries

For all general enquiries about UC services, phone (03) 366 7001.

