This is the first of a series of online tutorials designed to help you make the adjustment to uni life. The first tutorial focuses on the expectations of university life, how uni might be different to other study you’ve done, what these differences mean for you, and what it means to be an independent learner.

Expectations
Let’s look at the expectations first. You may have heard from others about what it’s like to study at uni and you may have some expectation about what’s involved. Feedback from other students about what to expect has included some of the following points.

- When looking at their timetable, some students have been surprised about the amount of free time they seem to have but are also concerned about the heavy workload they have and how they will juggle the two.
- Other areas which students have to adjust to include the new ways they have to study and learn, and the new teaching styles they come across.
- Also, depending on their circumstances, students can say they either have great social lives or, at some points of the year, no social life at all.
- Understanding the requirements of different kinds of assignment tasks is also often commented on by students – not all your assignment will be essays!
- Another area that will become very familiar to students is the need to reference or acknowledge ideas which they include in their assignments.
- Some students also find uni, at times, isolating and stressful and this online tutorial gives you some strategies to help you deal with this and supports you can draw on.
- Also one area of surprise for a lot of students is the strong online focus and the need for computers that’s involved in university life.

So what might be different?
In addition to the ones already listed, there are other differences that you might come across depending on the experiences and backgrounds you have.

- These include the overall size of the uni and the large numbers of students.
- The time you spend in class might also be less than what you are used to.
- The kinds of classes you have might be new to you. Depending on the degree and courses you are doing, you may have lectures, tutorials, seminars, practicals and studio to name a few.
- Staff may also have different expectations of you and you will find that staff are not readily available or on campus all the time.
- The teaching methods might also be different to what you are used to. We’ve already mentioned the online presence involved in your study, but there are other differences that you might have to adjust to in this area.
Regarding assessment - you may have to learn about different kinds of assessment types and formats, such as reports, annotated bibliographies etcetera, that kind of thing. These assessment types are usually quite formal and demanding.

There may be others that we haven’t actually covered. Some of these may be in the next section.

So what might be different for you? More information about differences between uni study and other institutions can be found at the Starting uni link. As you can see, there are a number of different categories that you might be able to relate to such as: if you’ve come from TAFE, if you’ve studied at SAIBT, if you’re an international student. So have a look at those to actually give you some more pointers about that the differences might be.

Implications
So what does all this mean for you? There are implications. There are lots of implications of the new learning environment. One is that it means that it’s important that you make new contacts and friendships – they’ll provide great support when you need it and may have answers to questions you might have.

You’ll also find that you need to adapt to the new lifestyle, culture and learning environment that you’ve now entered into. At first this can be overwhelming; especially with all the new terms that you have to learn. Also you’ll need to acquire new skills strategies and resources to help you with your new learning environment.

Also one of the biggest implications is that you will need to be an independent learner.

Being an independent learner
So what does it mean to be an independent learner?
Well, basically it means that you are responsible for your own learning.

What this means is that as an independent learner, you take control of and integrate your learning.

An independent learner is also organised and has good time management skills.

Also independent learners are responsible for their study, the learning they do and their attendance.

An independent learner is pro-active when it comes to their learning, they ask questions and clarify or get answers to any problems they have.

You may already have some of these skills but there may be others that you don’t. What might be an area that you might need to work on?
Strategies to become an independent learner

- Strategies to help you become an independent learner include making a network of friends.
- Use your time wisely by prioritising and planning so that you get a healthy balance in your life.
- Understanding that the university is a large institution so try to learn about the university, its many parts and how they and the university work.
- Also as an institution, there are also rules, processes and regulations and trying to understand these is important especially in the areas of learning and assignments.
- Also try to ask questions if you don’t know, ask questions, aim to seek answers to problems. Good starting points are Campus Central, the Learning and Teaching Unit, called the LTU, your lecturers and tutors (of course!), the library and the School office.

There are a number of online resources that can help you when starting at uni. This slide provides links to some of these and reinforces some points that have been raised already. Familiarise yourself with the computer, internet and the UniSA website or intranet. The link to Online@UniSA takes you through these areas and provides useful information to the online environment. On the subject of the online environment, make sure you check your course homepages and emails regularly and bookmark useful websites.

Another two resources which have some useful pointers are The first 6 weeks in EASS website, which has been discussed and has information specifically for EASS students and the Smart Start guide.

Also familiarise yourself with the LTU website and the resources and workshops which are offered and the L3 EASS website which is a comprehensive resource of EASS related information.

We wish you luck in your studies. For information about strategies to manage your time and workload, work through the second of the online tutorials of Starting uni.