

# ELS Effective Learning Service



## MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR STUDIES

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Queen Margaret University  
EDINBURGH

## Making the most of your studies

Although most of your studies will be off campus this year, you can still have a fully engaging learning experience if you take advantage of all of the resources on offer.

Your teaching will be provided in three formats: on campus seminars, synchronous online lectures and seminars, and asynchronous (recorded) online lectures. All of these have their own advantages and you can really get a lot out of them if you fully engage (see our guide on *Making the Most of Taught Sessions*).

You will see, in the module descriptors for each of your modules, that the allocated hours add up to many more than your taught sessions account for. The other hours should be made up with self-directed study. This can be time spent engaging in some of the support offered at the University, but it will mainly consist of studying on your own or with some of your classmates. This guide provides some pointers on how to make the most of this self-directed learning time.

There are many learning resources you can access at the University, not just those provided by your module.

## The LRC

The Learning Resource Centre (LRC) is open to students. When you are on campus for classes, use time before and after your class to go to the LRC and look through books. Although you are able to access most of the library resources online, it can be useful to browse the shelves to see what is available. Sometimes you might see something that didn't come up on your database search.

You might want to stay and study for some time in the library. Sometimes this can be more effective than studying at home. You can give yourself a set time to study with specific achievable objectives (see our guide on *Time Management*).

You can also make use of the many online resources provided by the LRC. All of the LRC resources can be found on the website ([LRC webpages](#)). They include:

- sessions with the Liaison Librarians via MS Teams or Collaborate.
- workshops throughout semester
  - referencing
  - using refworks (referencing writing software)
  - using the databases to search for reading for your course
- [Write and Cite](#) referencing guide.

## PALS

PALS (Peer Assisted Learning Scheme) runs student-led learning sessions. These are a relaxed, fun and informal way to receive support for your learning at QMU. You can use a session either to help you understand something you are struggling with in a module, or perhaps to consolidate and develop the learning you have already completed. PALS also run revision sessions so you can brush up on your knowledge in the run-up to your exams.

The students who run the sessions are trained PALS Leaders and they've all been where you are now and want to support you by sharing their experience. This year all sessions will be run remotely via Collaborate.

At present, some programmes do not run PALS sessions, but they are available in the following Programmes:

- BA (Hons) Business Management
- BA (Hons) Events & Festival Management
- BA (Hons) International Hospitality & Tourism Management
- BA (Hons) Drama
- BA (Hons) Theatre & Film
- BA (Hons) Film & Media
- BA (Hons) Media & Communications
- BA (Hons) PR Marketing Communications
- BSc (Hons) Psychology and Sociology
- BSc (Hons) Public Sociology
- BSc (Hons) Psychology
- BA (Hons) Education Studies (Primary)
- BA (Hons) Education Studies

You can find out more about PALS on the website [PALS webpages](#), or you can email [PALS@gmu.ac.uk](mailto:PALS@gmu.ac.uk). To book a place on a session visit [Student Central - PALS](#).

## The ELS

The ELS have a number of resources you can access. The guides (like this one) which are available on the website are just a small part of our service. Go to [Student Central](#) to book a place:

- One-to-one appointments
  - these take place via email on Microsoft Teams
  - they last up to 50 minutes
  - we can discuss study skills, time-management techniques, writing skills etc.
  - we can help you understand an assignment brief, guide you in planning an essay or report, read a draft of an essay and give you advice on how to improve it, and much more!
- Workshops
  - these take place on Collaborate in synchronous sessions of one hour
  - numbers will be limited to 20 per session
  - topics covered include
    - Studying remotely
    - Essay planning
    - Essay writing
    - Reading effectively
    - Using sources
    - Criticality
- Academic English for non-native speakers
  - this is a 10 week course
  - it will be delivered via Collaborate
  - you will be expected to attend all sessions
  - it will cover all the skills needed for studying effectively at university in the UK

We have some one-to-one appointments available on campus. To book one of these, please email us at [els@gmu.ac.uk](mailto:els@gmu.ac.uk) (for home students), or [elsinternational@gmu.ac.uk](mailto:elsinternational@gmu.ac.uk) (for international students).

## Studying on your own

Although it is good to make use of the extra sessions available at the University, the majority of your self-directed study hours will involve you studying on your own. There are many things you can do to make sure you are maximising your learning.

### Reading

Reading is one of the most important skills you will develop at University. You need to read in order to explore further the topics introduced in your lectures, to prepare for your seminars so as to be able to participate fully in discussions, and to research information that you can use to form the content of your assignments.

On the Hub for each of your modules you will find your reading lists, complete with links to the electronic versions of the books and journals. You should check these out at the start of semester and start reading some straight away. Your lecturer may identify specific articles or chapters in a book to be read for certain seminars; there should be a schedule available on the Hub area which lays out what each week's sessions will be about, and you can plan your reading around this.

You can use the University [Library Databases](#) to access academic books and journals which you would otherwise have to pay for. Your reading lists are just the start of your reading journey and you are expected to find further sources for yourself. If you find this difficult, think about attending one of the [LRC workshops](#).

Much of your reading this year may be online, but do think about spending some time in the LRC to look for hard copies of books, and printing off some journal articles. It is often easier to read from a paper copy. Sometimes it might be more convenient to have a paper copy. Consider where and how you read and make paper copies accordingly.

All reading should be *active reading*. There are various techniques to help you with this. See our guides on [Active Reading](#) and [Making the Most of e-Resources](#).

### Reviewing

You should make time to review your notes from lectures and seminars. In sessions, you take notes; when reviewing you need to process these and *make* notes. This helps you develop your understanding of the topic as you will have notes from the lecture which help you prepare for the seminar and in turn lead you to further study. Try to use both these approaches to notes – don't leave it at simply 'taking notes': *making notes* is the way consolidate the process.

### Understanding

Sometimes it can be useful to watch TED talks or YouTube videos to help you understand something in your module. These can be a good way to get you started if you are feeling stuck with something. They are also good as they are often short so can be fitted in when perhaps you don't have time to get down to some serious reading! You can also watch them on the bus or train on your way into University to get a quick refresh on the seminar topic. Remember, these are not academic sources to be referenced, but just, often very useful, resources to facilitate learning.

## Reflecting

Reflective practice is being used more and more as a form of assessment at university level and you may have a reflective report or portfolio to submit as part your module assessment. However, reflection is also a useful tool for learning, even when it is not for a specific assignment. Get into the habit of keeping a reflective diary as this will help you identify what areas of your studies you need to work on more and what you are doing well in. Have a look at the ELS guide on [Reflective Practice](#), or have a look on YouTube where you will find lots of useful videos!

## The Hub

Remember the Hub is the key place to get information about your modules and it is also a place to engage in some self-directed study. There are various features on the Hub which your lecturer might use to communicate with students. One which is often used is a the discussion board; if your lecturer sets up a discussion board for your module, be sure to engage with it as it is a space in which to share and exchange ideas with other students on your course, students to whom you might otherwise not speak. Check out this video and information on [discussion boards](#) to help you make the most of the feature. Also, check out the other features of [the Hub](#).

## Staying in touch

This year, perhaps more than ever, staying in touch with your fellow students and finding space and time for collaborative learning is really important. You won't have the same opportunities for ad hoc meetings on campus. Where, in other years, you could just wander down to the canteen after a lecture and sit and have informal chat about your module, this year such meetings will have to be more carefully arranged.

Think about where and how you can meet up with classmates so that you can study together or even just chat about your course. As mentioned above there are the 'official' channels of discussion boards on the Hub and PALS sessions, but don't only rely on these.

## Meeting remotely

You can set up a WhatsApp or Facebook group for your classmates, perhaps, and you could use this for informal chats about the module and your studies. You could arrange meetings on Microsoft Teams where you can study together, sharing reading that you have done or recommendations for good sources that you have found; use the different features on Teams, such as screen share, so that you can interact more with the group.

## Meeting in person

Although there are many ways to stay in touch via electronic media, it is still a good idea to meet up in person when you can. If you have a class on campus, think about staying a little longer afterwards to spend time chatting to your classmates. Arrange this in advance so that you all know what the plan is. Bear in mind social distancing regulations and arrange your meetings accordingly (take into account number of households etc.). If the weather is nice, you could consider having a meeting outside in the campus grounds, or if it is raining, then you could go to the canteen or the Students' Union.

Think about meeting up with classmates outside of University. Could you host a small study group at home? Remember to follow the rules, but don't discount working together in person because of social distancing: three minds are better than one, and if you set up a regular study group with some friends then you can make the most of studying together while staying safe.

***All of these activities are easier to manage if you have a clear schedule with dedicated time for study. You should make an area for studying in at home; or know where and how you like to study when you are not on campus. For ideas on how to do this effectively see our guide on Time Management and Remote Learning.***