

When first starting university it's common to feel excited, overwhelmed, apprehensive, enthusiastic, motivated, and scared. This handout might help.

## A sustainable and healthy approach

Getting through university – from your first enrolment to graduation – is a huge achievement. Not only do you have to get through university academically, but you also need to maintain your social, mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health as well – your wellbeing. You might be wondering, how is that possible?

You will not get through university if you don't look after your wellbeing. You are a whole person with a whole life. University is only one part of that, and an important part some of the time, but only one part. You need a healthy and sustainable approach to this period of your life, an approach that will see you getting through the complete lifecycle of university with your social, mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health intact!

## Focus on what you can control

There are many things in your life that you can't control – all those things that are external to you and often unexpected, such as other people's thoughts and behaviors, relationship issues, financial concerns, parenting and family issues, changes at work, changes to your study schedule, accidents, unexpected health concerns, government policies, world conflict. The list goes on and on! You may be able to influence some of these through providing information or modelling certain behaviors, but you can't expect a particular outcome. What you can control is what you choose to do each day, how this influences your wellbeing, and how you respond to the things outside of your control.

Choosing to look after your wellbeing will help you cope better with everyday stressors and challenges, respond to these in ways that are in line with your values and goals, and have increased resilience for the out of your control and unexpected things that happen. Circumstances beyond your control, as well as the unexpected, can create stress and anxiety, and may shock and

unsettle you, but you will be able to re-group and bounce back much more readily if your physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual health are well. The more you focus on what you can control, you will notice how much more you have control of. Let go of what you can't control, and focus your energy on your actions, your values and goals, and your response to the world around you.

## Create a healthy study plan

**Pace yourself.** University is not a fast-paced race to the finish. Your degree needs to be approached strategically, and methodically. There is a long way to go. Think of it like a marathon. You need to have the right equipment, the right support crew, a plan for the whole course, and scheduled rest breaks. There will be times when you run faster, times when you run slower, and times when you might walk. Keep your eye on the overall goal of finishing your degree. It's a social, mental, emotional, and spiritual race, as much as a physical one.

When you're feeling good, work a bit harder. Put in an extra hour a day, or half an hour a day, just something to pick up the pace a little. And then when you're not feeling so good, ease off the pace. Cut back an hour each day, or more. And be OK with that, because you know that you have a 'buffer' from those times you were feeling better!

**Make a plan.** You need a goal or goals, and a planned course to achieve them. What do you want to have achieved at the finish line? A pass, a distinction, a certain GPA? Do you want to make new friends? Learn some life skills? How will you achieve these things?

Everyone's plan will be different. Some people like to keep things flexible, particularly if they know they will feel stressed if not following the plan! The key is having a good balance between a not-so-strict plan that you struggle to follow it, and a not-so-loose plan that things get away from you and you find yourself getting behind.

Plan first for sleeping, eating, and exercise, followed by relaxation and social time. How much time a day do you want to spend catching up with friends, reading a good book, meditating, watching TV, listening to music, attending church,

contributing to a community activity, playing with your dog? Sleeping and eating well, exercising, and being happily engaged, by yourself or with others, is important for your wellbeing, so that's why they should go into your plan first!

Now you need to add your university studies to your plan. How many subjects are you doing? If 10 hours per subject is recommended each week (including contact time and your own study time), how many hours do you need to put in each week to achieve your goal? Include in your plan:

- Your scheduled lectures and tutorials
- Assignment due dates, and when you will start your assignments
- Your exam timetable, with enough review time in the lead up to each exam.

**Use shifts.** The most sustainable and healthy way to study, is to study in "shifts" or chunks of time, with breaks in between, just like you do in your paid job (think of university as an unpaid job!). To stay well you need to work hard, then stop, recover, and repeat. Set yourself "shifts" of no more than two hours of university study, before you stop and have a recovery break of at least 15 minutes. The break needs to be a complete break – listen to music, do some relaxation or a mindfulness technique, make a sandwich, or just stare out the window. Give yourself a mental break as well as a physical break. Try not to use your break to check social media.

Write what you will do in each "shift", perhaps a subject number, or you might expand this to a focus area as well. Whether it's a lecture, an assignment, readings, etc. This will keep you focused so you can work hard while on "shift". Working in shifts also enables you to focus only on the "shift" ahead. All you need to know is when your next "shift" is and what you've planned to do during it – that's it!

If you miss a study "shift", due to family, friends, not feeling well, simply shift your "shift"! If you missed a two hour "shift" then add a two hour "shift" somewhere next week, or the week after that! It's not lost time, it's just moved time. The key to working in shifts is this: try to start and finish each "shift" on time, focus and work hard while on "shift", give yourself a complete break in between "shifts", and shift "shifts" when required.

## Help is available

Most of this makes a lot of sense, but it might be new and unfamiliar. Or, you may have done all of this but you're not OK socially, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, or physically. Ask for support if you need it.

### Further information and support

The JCU Learning Centre offers a wide range of resources on its website: <https://www.jcu.edu.au/students/learning-centre/getting-started>. You can also seek one-on-one advice and support by visiting the Learning Advice Desk on the ground floor of the Library on the Townsville and Cairns campuses, or by submitting an online request via <https://www.jcu.edu.au/students/learning-centre/contacts>

## Example study plan

The following example study plan is not the only way to plan your wellbeing and university study. A planner, diary, or electronic calendar, even butchers paper, may be useful for you. The important thing is that by establishing a plan you can gain a good overview of how many hours of study you will require each day to meet the subject requirements, and how you can make these fit around your health and wellbeing.

Scheduled lectures and tutorials may not neatly fit into good "shifts" of time. Some may be longer than two hours and some may be immediately scheduled after each other. Some may start at 8am. Make the most of your schedule, take snacks, have mini breaks of quick relaxation and mindfulness while sitting in a lecture or tutorial, get up and have a stretch.

In this example, the student has scheduled 30-minute breaks between "shifts". You may prefer to take 15-minute breaks and fit in a bit more study time each day. You may work better with 30-minute shifts with 10-minute breaks in between. The important thing is that you have regular breaks that allow you to completely switch off for that time.

In the example, the student plans to work on two subjects each day. You may prefer to stick to one

subject per day. The student has chosen to include two hours of relaxation time most nights, and study for three hours over the weekend. You may want to leave your weekends completely free, and do more work on week days. You may want to do your study every second day! You may work better in the mornings, or perhaps the evenings are better for you. Work out what works best for you!

In this example, the student has committed to 40.5 hours of study time each week. Some degrees will

require more than the average 10 hours per subject. Tackling assignments early is important. By scheduling assignment time each week, you can begin chipping away at them from Week 1.

Sticking to the same bedtime and get-up time each day is beneficial for your wellbeing, but not always possible. Try to stick to a good sleeping routine where you can.

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7.00am	Wake up / Breakfast	Wake up / Breakfast	Wake up / Breakfast	Wake up / Breakfast Exercise	Wake up / Breakfast		
8.30am	Uni (2hrs) Subject 1	Uni (2hrs) Subject 2	Uni (2hrs) Subject 3	Uni (2hrs) Subject 4	Uni (2hrs) Subject 1	Wake up / Breakfast	Wake up / Breakfast
9.30am						Relaxation	House work
10.30am	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break	Exercise	
11.00am	Uni (1.5hrs) Subject 1	Uni (1.5hrs) Subject 2	Uni (1.5hrs) Subject 3	Uni (1.5hrs) Subject 4	Uni (1.5hrs) Subject 2	Uni (1.5 hrs) Assignments	Uni (1.5 hrs) Assignments
12.30pm	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1.30pm	Uni (2hrs) Subject 2	Uni (2hrs) Subject 1	Uni (2hrs) Subject 4	Uni(2hrs) Subject 3	Uni (2hrs) Subject 3	Work	Social Time
3.30pm	Break	Break	Break	Break/Meal	Break		
4.00pm	Uni (1.5 hrs) Subject 2	Uni (1.5 hrs) Subject 1	Uni (1.5 hrs) Subject 4	Work	Uni (1.5 hrs) Subject 4	Social time	Relaxation
5.30pm	Exercise	Exercise	Exercise		Exercise		
6.30pm	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner		Dinner		
7.30pm	Uni (1 hr) Subject 1	Uni (1 hr) Subject 2	Uni (1 hr) Subject 3		Uni (1 hr) Subject 4		
8.30pm	Relaxation	Relaxation	Relaxation	Relaxation / Snack	Social time		
10.30pm	Bed time	Bed time	Bed time	Bed time			Bed time
11.30pm					Bed time	Bed time	
<b>Study time</b>	<b>8 hrs</b>	<b>8 hrs</b>	<b>8 hrs</b>	<b>5.5 hrs</b>	<b>8 hrs</b>	<b>1.5 hrs</b>	<b>1.5 hrs</b>
							<b>Total study = 40.5 hrs</b>

## Student Equity and Wellbeing

**James Cook University**

**Web** <https://www.jcu.edu.au/student-equity-and-wellbeing>

**Email** [studentwellbeing@jcu.edu.au](mailto:studentwellbeing@jcu.edu.au)

**Phone** Townsville (07) 478 14711 or Cairns (07) 423 21150

**In person** Level 1 of the Library in Townsville and Cairns

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