

9 What is expected of you as a student?

So you've made it to your new college/university and you're ready to start your first classes! As a foreign student, possibly from a very different education and cultural background, you need to know what your professors or lecturers expect from you.

The role of the teacher and lecturer/professor

In many non-English-speaking cultures, the teacher acts as a guide in all aspects of the classroom. The students are told what to study and when. Everyone is very clear on who has to do what and when because the teacher tells them. In these cultures, the teacher gives direction in most aspects of the course. The students may not do a lot of extra outside, unguided work.

The role of the teacher or professor/lecturer is very different from this in English-speaking countries. You will learn that you must be independent in action and thought. You have to be able to manage your own learning and add your own opinion and ideas to what the course is teaching you as a whole. Many international students find this idea very frightening at first, and some find it difficult to see the point of it. However, after time, most also think it's a very exciting new way to learn.

Don't forget that in the US, "professor" is used to describe most teachers. However, in the UK "professor" is only used for the most senior teacher in the department. Most people who teach in UK universities are referred to as "lecturers." In the UK, if you call your lecturers "professor," they will think that you're trying to score points with them by addressing them at a higher level than they are.

The independent and autonomous learner

In English-speaking countries, students must be able to work independently and autonomously in college/university. You'll have an advisor or personal tutor that you can go to, but that person is there for general questions about your degree requirements. You must be able to manage your schedule, just like the manager of a small company! It's your job to know when assignments are due, for example. It's your job to figure out when you need to start working on that big midterm paper/essay. You must be very organized and learn excellent time management skills to succeed.

Although you'll sometimes do group projects, most of your work will be done independently.

independent (adj): If someone is independent, they do not need help or money from anyone else.

autonomous (adj): An autonomous person makes their own decisions rather than being influenced by someone else.

Other terms often used for independent learning

“Self-learning,” “autonomous learning,” and “self-directed learning” are other terms that your professors/lecturers might use to describe what they expect of you. This doesn't mean that you'll get zero guidance or help from them. It does mean, in many cases, however, that you will not receive the amount of guidance that you may be used to in your own educational culture.

Why is independent learning so important?

In English-speaking cultures, being independent and making your own decisions as often as you can is very important. Whether you're in the US, New Zealand, UK, or South Africa, English-speaking culture believes strongly in independent actions and thoughts. In these cultures, you must be able to have a high level of independence to be successful. From a

very young age, children are asked to learn to do things for themselves. They're also taught to make decisions from early childhood onward. At the age of 18, most people are off to college, university, or starting their working lives. This is the age that most people move away from their parents' home (or at least try to!). Being able to handle all the responsibility of being an adult becomes very important. This is true in life, work, and education. The more you can do for yourself, the better. There are, of course, times you need to work together, or you'll still need help. This is when it's good to go to your advisor/personal tutor or professor/lecturer, classmates, or friends.

Where independence in the classroom starts

On the first day of each class, your professor/lecturer will present you with the syllabus. They'll usually discuss it for a short time. It's very important to pay close attention while they do so as the syllabus contains all the necessary information related to the course.

The syllabus or handbook

This is the paper or web page that your professor/lecturer will give you to explain what the class/program will be like. It usually includes:

- the professor's/lecturer's name and contact details (pay attention to their office hours);
- office hours for the student support centre;
- textbook information (including which edition, make sure you only buy the one listed!);
- other readings such as journal articles;
- style guidelines (for example, which citation and reference system your major uses);
- a schedule;
- assignments;

- policies on attendance, behavior, plagiarism, and other important issues;
- a statement on independent learning.

Here's an example of a college-/university-level syllabus. Please remember that each college/university and professor/lecturer will have different syllabus styles. This is just being presented as one possible example.

International Business 304

Fall Semester/Autumn term, 2014

Class lectures: M-F 1:00 – 1:50

Professor: Dr. Carol Jameson

Contact details:

Email: cjameson@university.edu

Office: Business building, Room 415

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 10:00–11:00 or by appointment

Office Phone: (444) 333-2222

Course Overview

This course will give you an overview of communication issues related to international business today. With a focus on communication styles between the Western and Eastern business worlds, contracts, conflict resolution, and communication styles, this course aims to improve your communication knowledge to prepare the MBA student for all global scenarios.

Required Texts

[This is a list of the textbooks, journal articles, or other readings that you must read throughout the course.]

Collins Cambridge IGCSE Business Studies Student Book (Collins IGCSE Business Studies), Dean, A., Gardener, M. & Machin, D. (2013). Collins ISBN: 09780007507023

Communicating Globally: Intercultural Communication and International Business.

Schmidt, W. V., Conaway, R. N., Easton, S. S., & Wardrope, W. J. (2007). SAGE Publications.

Towards Managing Diversity: Cultural Aspects of Conflict Management in International Business Environments. Hamdorf, D. (2006). VDM Publishing.

A separate list of journal articles from the following journals will be supplied on the first day of class:

Journal of Business Ethics

Journal of International Business Studies

Journal of Business Communication

[You must make sure that you get exactly the books they've listed. If it's listed as 2nd edition, for example, don't buy the 1st edition. It will be different from the one your professor/lecturer will use. If you're not sure you have the right edition, you can always check the ISBN.]

Course Requirements

You will write one essay and one research paper during the semester/term, and take a midterm and final exam.

Please note: the final exam will be cumulative.

Essay and Research paper

All written work will follow the APA (American Psychologists Association) style guidelines of citation and reference.

[Note: there are many different style guides in academia, so you may use different ones depending on your major area of study.]

Essay—(7 pages, including reference page)

Students will write a comparative essay on the different negotiation styles of China and the United States.

Research paper—(15 pages, including reference page)

Students will write a research paper on conflict resolution in international business.

Grading

Essay 25%

Research paper 25%

Midterm exam 25%

Final exam 25%

Grading scale

90-100 A

80-89 B

70-79 C

60-69 D

Below 60 is an F

Course Policies and Student Expectations

- Students must come to class every day. Students must not come late to class. If students are more than ten minutes late, they will be marked as absent.
- Come to class prepared and ready to discuss readings.
- You must take notes.
- You must show respect to your classmates and professor/lecturer.
- Late papers will lose points for each day that they are late.
- Papers that are later than 3 days will not be accepted.
- Cell phones/Mobile phones must be turned off at all times in class.
- Laptops may be used for taking notes or research during lectures.
- Cheating is not acceptable.
- Students will receive an F for any exam that they have cheated on.
- Plagiarism, or any form of copying other people's work, is not tolerated by this university. If students plagiarize, they will be reported to the Dean. The Dean's office will then decide if that student will fail the course, or be asked to leave the school.

cumulative exam (noun): A cumulative exam is one that covers content from the start, to the finish, of a course.

citation (noun): A citation from a book or other piece of writing is a passage or phrase from it.

reference (noun): A reference is something such as a number or a name that tells you where you can obtain the information you want.

It's your job to read and reread the syllabus very carefully. Keep it with you at all times so that you always know what you need to do. Look at it regularly to make sure you're on schedule with all of your assignments. Many students will ask questions that are on the syllabus a few weeks after the course has started. This can make your professor/lecturer frustrated with you. They may think: if this student can't read the syllabus carefully, how will he/she be able to read a long reading assignment? The time to ask questions about the syllabus is on the first day, when your professor/lecturer is going over it in class. After that, you're expected to go to your syllabus for information on the actual course. It's one, of many reasons, why you should never miss the first day of class!

What your professor/lecturer does not want you to do

As an independent student who can take care of himself or herself, there are certain things that you are not expected to ask help for.

In English-speaking countries, your professors/lecturers are responsible only for things related to your studies. Occasionally you may have a professor/lecturer who's happy to help you with other things, but don't expect this. It's not a good idea to ask a professor/lecturer for help with:

- filling out application forms of any kind;
- writing statements of purpose;

- filling out a driver's license application;
- making appointments or other arrangements by phone;
- booking a flight;
- finding somewhere to live.

Students from cultures where professors/lecturers give very clear instructions on what to do often feel that they need more guidance when studying in an English-speaking country. Remember that your professor/lecturer expects you to figure things out for yourself and is not allowed to bend rules for students. Academic things you shouldn't ask your professor/lecturer or Teaching Assistant (TA) for help with include:

- asking to go over every detail of your paper during office hours, or worse, during or at the end of class;
- second or third explanations of something you've asked your professor/lecturer or TA before;
- asking for permission to retake quizzes/tests and exams;
- asking to take quizzes and exams on different days from the schedule. The only exception to this would be if you had a family or medical emergency.

English language

Remember that English will continue to be a challenge for you at times. Getting a great score on the IELTS or TOEFL test does not mean that your English is now perfect—and that's OK! If you're a typical advanced student, you'll still have problems with prepositions, articles, and phrasal verbs, to name just a few. It's a good idea to think about what your most common problems are with English. Then, do something positive about it. What you need to remember is that your professors/lecturers are not likely to be teachers of English as a foreign language. Their job is to focus on teaching you their subject, not gerunds versus infinitives.

Here are some independent ways to improve your English language skills:

- Buy dictionaries that focus on specific, more difficult areas. You can usually find these on some of the trickiest grammar points in English such as phrasal verbs (for example “go on,” “go out,” etc.). *Collins COBUILD Phrasal Verbs Dictionary* (ISBN: 9780007435487) is a good example of this kind of dictionary.
- Buy general reference books for very difficult subjects such as article usage.
- Study subject-specific books for learners of English, such as *Collins COBUILD Key Words for Mechanical Engineering* (ISBN: 9780007489787).

Language support on campus

In universities and colleges with a large number of international students, like many big universities in Australia, there may be a special unit or department where international students can go for help with English. Many American universities have writing centers, and British universities often offer help with academic language in general. The staff there can help you understand what your professor/lecturer wants from you, and can check your English for you.

If you want to go to the language support unit for help, you'll probably need to make an appointment. Make sure you do this at least a week or two before your assignment is due. Check how long your appointment will be: often they'll last only half an hour to an hour. Make sure you can explain what you don't understand when you turn up, to save time. It helps to write a list of questions that you have about your assignment and bring it to your appointment. Remember the staff will have a limited time with you, and that they are not allowed to write your essay or assignment for you. Some centers will only comment on small sections of your writing, or on assignments that have already been handed in. This is

still useful, as the focus is on improving your language skills for future work.

Personal responsibility

When you're independent, you become responsible for more things in your life. This is true when you're a student. You are responsible for:

- regular participation in class;
- turning in your assignments on time;
- not giving bad excuses when you don't hand in assignments on time (don't tell your professor/lecturer that you were too tired or up all night. In English-speaking countries, that is the quickest way to make your professor/lecturer lose respect for you);
- asking right away if you don't understand something;
- taking notes all the time. Don't wait for your professor/lecturer to say, "Write this down!";
- reviewing your notes regularly;
- getting all reading done on time.

Being a proactive learner

An important part of being an independent learner is to be proactive. Being proactive is also very important for any job you have in the future.

proactive (adj): Proactive actions are intended to cause changes, rather than just reacting to change.

Proactive learners can see what they need, and make something happen to help themselves learn. For example, if you notice that it's hard to make yourself study regularly, you can start a study group. Then, you'll have a regular meeting that signals, "Time to study!"

(Remember—sometimes your classmates will understand something that you don't. Their explanations of an idea or

concept can sometimes make more sense than the one given by the professor/lecturer. This is especially true for subjects such as math/math(s).)

Improving your time management skills

Many students, both home and international, fail their courses unnecessarily because they cannot manage their time. It can be difficult to know what to study and when. There are many things that you can do to manage your time in a better way. Doing these things should also reduce your stress levels, and make your life as a student much happier.

The student planner

Keep a planner for all parts of your life. This could be a paper planner (many institutions issue one of these to students when they enroll) or the calendar on your smartphone. At the beginning of the semester/term, you need to write down your class assignments, quizzes/tests, papers, and major exams for the entire semester/term in this planner. Your planner should also include:

- other time commitments that include family or work;
- social events and activities;
- weekends away or vacations (when you won't be able to study).

The idea is that everything that you need to do, every day, is there, in front of you. You want to make sure that you're aware of what you need to get done and the time you have to do it. Then, make sure to update the details of your planner daily, or if you can't do it daily, at the very least, weekly.

When you start your week, you can look at your planner and know what is happening and on which days. Though it may be frightening to look at, it will also help you to focus and stay on task. If you aren't sure of exactly when things are happening, your stress levels will increase. A student planner is like having a map so that you won't get lost.

Planning week-to-week

Make a weekly plan and decide what needs to be done and when.

- Make to-do lists, even daily to-do lists if you're extremely busy.
- Do everything you can to plan each day of your week so that nothing is a last-minute panic.
- Write down how long you think each assignment or paper will take.
- Write down blocks of time for study each day.
- Put deadlines and due dates into your smartphone's calendar to receive automatic message reminders.
- Work ahead if you have a quiet day or free afternoon. This is especially important if you have a very big assignment, such as a major research paper, coming up. Take advantage of slower days to get started well in advance.
- Schedule "dead time," such as waiting for your dentist's appointment, as a time to review something short but important.

Problem-solving for some major time management challenges

Your social life is taking up too much of your time

As a student, you need to have some free time to relax and forget about studying for a while. However, you probably won't have time to do every activity that you want.

Write a list for yourself and analyze it. Which activity is most important to you? Which ones can you stop doing for the moment to make your schedule less crazy? Sometimes your friends may be disappointed that you have to say no to some things. But this is such an important time in your life, and you need to succeed. If they're good friends, they'll understand.

You are doing too much paid work

Students who have a casual job can be tempted to take on too many shifts, especially if they're short of money. You may be afraid that your boss will fire you if you don't work when he or she asks you, or that you won't have enough money to live on. It helps to check when your exams and assignments are due and tell your boss when you will not be available a few weeks in advance, so he or she can plan around you. If money is a problem, try to cut down on how much you spend so you don't need to work so much. Often you can save a lot on food and entertainment if you need to.

You plan too much

Some students feel that they are making progress when they are writing down lists of what they are going to do, but they never seem to start doing them. Writing down too many plans can make the work seem bigger and harder, so go for small, precise, and manageable goals instead, and start one of them as soon as possible.

You don't know how to prioritize your studies

Working on the most difficult or time-consuming projects and assignments first is a good idea. You need to do these things when your mind is fresh. Once you finish the worst of your assignments, doing the easier things will feel like nothing in comparison!

prioritize (verb): If you prioritize the tasks that you have to do, you decide which are the most important and do them first.

You're too tired to study or pay attention in class

Think about what time of day you feel most awake and productive. Are you a morning person or do you work well in the evening? Make sure to keep those times of day available for study if possible. If you're constantly tired, it may be that you're not getting enough sleep. Although college/university

students think they don't need a lot of sleep, doctors agree that eight hours a night is necessary to stay healthy. On less than eight hours, your mind doesn't work as efficiently. If you're regularly getting much fewer than eight hours a night, you might have problems remembering things you've learned. Sometimes you need to step away from the computer screen and smartphone and go to bed!

Not enough time to memorize key vocabulary and concepts

Try writing key words and definitions on sticky notes. Then put them on the refrigerator, bathroom mirror, or a space in your living room. As you walk by, brush your teeth, or look for something in the fridge, you'll be "memorizing" without knowing it!

Don't forget to motivate and reward yourself

Set goals for yourself regularly. For example, tell yourself that, even though your big paper isn't due for two more weeks, you're going to write five pages by Friday. When you reach your goal, reward yourself with a night out with friends. Write your goals on a wall chart if that helps. Some people find visual aids to be very helpful. This will also help you feel a sense of achievement.

Now you're a highly independent student!

There are, of course, appropriate times when you really will need to ask for help. Don't hesitate to ask for help from your professor/lecturer if:

- you're in danger of failing a course;
- you have a personal emergency and you can't make it to the exam;
- there's a difficult idea or concept in your class that you have tried, but failed, to understand.

In Chapter 13, we give you more detailed information on how to deal with major problems.

Knowing when you have tried everything on your own, but still need help, is an important part of becoming a truly independent learner.