

Chapter 1

LEARNING AT UNIVERSITY



LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this chapter you will have an understanding of university learning, your university course, some key terms and the learning process.

First of all, congratulations on achieving your place at university to begin your nurse training (or other healthcare-associated course). Some of you will have entered university straight from school or college, others may be coming back to academic study after many years. Your initial concerns about the course will vary depending on your particular circumstances. For instance, for some new students first thoughts will be about finances, accommodation, child care, balancing study with family life and other responsibilities. Some of you will wonder how you'll manage when confronted with blood and gore, death and dying. And let's be honest, some of you will be more concerned initially about the social side to university, and about the possibilities of making lifelong friends. This diversity is one of the rich and fulfilling elements of university education, and where we can all learn from each others' experiences, skills and strengths.

Whoever you are or whatever your age, this book will assist you in making better use of your study time. Study skills evolve and mature through practice and as you move through your course.

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SCHOOL/COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

If you have come into university education straight from school or college, you will notice that there is much more autonomy: no one will be nagging you to get assignments in on time or competences signed off. The emphasis is on you, the individual, and on self-responsibility and

self-management. You will need to organise your study time around your clinical placements and prioritise different tasks (such as competency assessments, reflection and assignments).

One of the most important aspects of university study is the work you undertake independently of the tutors, either on your own or with other students. Sometimes you may be assessed on the outcomes of your group projects.

Another difference with university education is that teachers are usually referred to as tutors. Tutors will help you develop and provide support, and in addition you will have mentors, or preceptors, in your clinical placements to help guide you through your nurse education.

THE LEARNING PROCESS

To learn effectively you need to be aware of the four main factors of the learning process. This awareness will improve how you learn:

- **wanting to learn:** you will need a sense of purpose and motivation;
- **learning by doing:** you will need to practice (i.e. making hospital beds), perhaps making mistakes at first;
- **receiving feedback:** you will learn from both positive and negative feedback;
- **reflection:** you will also learn from reviewing and evaluating what has been learned, and drawing conclusions.

DEVELOPING YOUR LEARNING SKILLS

To get the best out of your university course you will need to develop and enhance a wide range of key skills, such as:

- time management,
- prioritising,
- team work and working with others,
- oral presentations,

- note-taking,
- communicating through written essays/assignments and reports,
- understanding numbers and charts,
- problem solving,
- reading effectively and efficiently,
- revision and exam skills,
- using assessment: self-assessment and peer assessment, and using feedback,
- information technology,
- using the library and gathering information.

These core skills will not only assist you during your course, but also when you are seeking employment. These are the **transferable skills** that you will use throughout your nursing career.

KEY TERMS FOR UNIVERSITY

At university you may encounter some terms or phrases that you haven't heard before. See Activity 1.1: how many or these do you know already?



Activity 1.1

Do you understand these key terms?

Lecture
Seminar
Tutorial
Practicals
Self-guided study
Computer-aided learning
Assessment

YOUR NURSING COURSE

Once you are on a nurse training programme, you will divide your time between university and supervised placements in local hospitals and the social care setting (the community). Most courses are full time and take 3 years to complete. Many universities offer part-time pre-registration nursing courses, which usually last for 5 or 6 years. As your course progresses you will be expected to deliver practical care, such as:

- checking and recording temperatures,
- measuring blood pressure and respiratory rates,
- helping doctors with physical examinations,
- giving medications and injections,
- collecting blood for transfusion,
- cleaning and dressing wounds,
- using hi-tech medical equipment.

These skills initially can only be performed under supervision with a qualified member of staff. You can conduct them on your own when you have had the competencies signed off and been deemed competent.

As a nurse, you will usually work 37.5 hours per week, which will include evenings, weekends, night shifts and bank holidays. Care does not stop for the patient over these times, so nor do your working hours.

In September 2011 pre-registration nurse education was moved from diploma to degree programmes. Since September 2013 students have only been able to qualify as a nurse by studying at degree level.

During your first year at university you will follow the common foundation programme, which includes an introduction to the four branches of nursing (adult nursing, paediatric nursing, mental health nursing, learning disabilities nursing) and maternity care. You will further be introduced to observational, communication and caring skills, study anatomy, physiology, psychology, sociology and social policy, and learn core practical caring skills. Over the remaining 2 years you will specialise in your

chosen branch of nursing and work in the relevant clinical placement areas.



Activity 1.2

The NHS Careers website (www.nhscareers.nhs.uk) states that to pursue a successful career in nursing you need to possess five key skills: what do you think they are?

Nurses also need to possess certain values and behaviours. These are part of the culture of compassionate care and are called the six Cs: care, compassion, competence, communication, courage and commitment (Department of Health and NHS Commissioning Board 2012).

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

You may feel that your computer skills are not up to speed, but do not ignore this problem. They are essential education skills in the modern world. Universities expect assignments to be word processed; handwritten assignments are a thing of the past. It is important for you to have an understanding of commonly used technological terms. See how many of the terms listed in Activity 1.3 that you know.



Activity 1.3

It is important for you to have an understanding of information and computing technology (or ICT). What do these terms mean?

application	modem
attachment	operating system
broadband	output devices
browser	portable document format (PDF)
compact disc (CD)	processor
download	program
DVD	RAM memory
file	router
firewall	software
folder	spam
forum	uniform resource locator (URL)
gigabyte (GB)	universal serial bus (USB)
hard disc	USB flash drive
input device	virus
internet	web
Internet Explorer	web browser
ISP (internet service provider)	wireless fidelity (WiFi)
megabyte (MB)	window
memory	Windows

During your course you will have ICT training. Embracing this skill will enable you to gather information at your fingertips using the worldwide web (from reputable sources only, of course). Chapter 4 goes into detail on how to conduct effective internet searches.

PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

At the start of your university course it is important to establish a place to study, where you can work undisturbed. The area should have plenty of space for you to spread your books and papers, where you have access to study aids and resources. It should have a good light source and not be too hot or cold. Now let's be realistic, most of us don't have these facilities, so we must make do with what we have. You will also require access to a computer, either at home or in the university. It is important to mention here that as well as support

from fellow students on your course, you will also need the support of those closest to you. Let me paint you a picture:

Student: OMG! Just had my draft assignment back and I have so much work to do by Monday's submission date! Why did I leave it all so late?

Significant other: What! The weather's meant to be lovely this weekend, so I thought we could go to the beach. You haven't had a weekend off in ages!

Student: You've got to be joking! I'll need to spend the weekend completing my work!

Significant other: Surely a few tweaks won't take all weekend!

Student: I've got a lot more to do than just a few tweaks!

Significant other: (through gritted teeth) Never mind.

Student: (ironically) Thanks for your support.

This is where you have to decide on your priorities: your choice could affect your marks and your chosen career.

STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

Some students have to contend with a learning difficulty while studying in higher education. This learning difficulty could be related to maths and numbers – known as dyscalculus – or relate to words, which is called dyslexia. Table 1.1 gives an overview of dyslexia.

It is important to inform your tutor of any learning difficulties that you have, and to inform your mentor while on clinical placement. This way you can gain the correct support through Student Services.

Table 1.1 Dyslexia: range of difficulties

Area	Problems
Speech and language	Numeracy (language of maths) Phonological skills (rhyming sounds, sounds and blends) Reading (tracking) Spelling, remembering words, sequencing, syllables, using wrong words Sequencing (letters in words and words in sentences)
Memory	Poor short-term memory Trouble with following instructions, spelling patterns, names
Motor skills	Clumsy, poor pencil control Poor organisational skills (lateness, untidy, disorganised)
Emotional and behaviour	Low self esteem (risk of failure, low confidence) Can be aggressive, disruptive or confrontational

Case Study 1.1

Not long ago I was facilitating the calculations test at my trust. This is taken by student nurses to prove their maths competence so that they can attend the Intravenous (IV) Study Day. Only then can a nurse be signed off for the ability to administer IV drugs (after competency assessments have been achieved). Students are asked to tell me in advance if they have any learning difficulties. Individuals who do may request tests on coloured paper or have extra time for tests. At the end of this particular test one newly qualified nurse was referred and I received an email later that day informing me that the nurse was dyslexic and should have received extra time for the test. I went to see her on the ward and took issue with the fact that she had not informed me of her learning needs. She said, 'Yes – I like to keep my learning disability secret, so that no one knows!' A Practice Development Trainer cannot assist students with learning needs if they're kept a secret. The nurse did pass her test after steps were taken to support her.

The moral of this story is to be honest about any learning needs you have. We can only help you if we know about them.

DEADLINES

Universities are not flexible about their deadlines. Your university will have formal mechanisms for arranging extensions if you have exceptional circumstances as to why you are unable to hand in your work on time. You should also discuss this with your tutor. You will be asked to provide evidence of the extenuating circumstances, such as a doctor's certificate. Exceptional circumstances do happen. I needed to have my appendix removed during my own nurse training. To cover the time I spent in hospital having my surgery and recovering afterwards I applied for and received an extension for an assignment.

KEEPING GOING

Much of your university work will require you to work on your own. This does not mean that a group of students can't set up a study support group, exchanging ideas and interpreting assignment questions. But when you do work on your own it may be difficult to keep yourself motivated. One student informed me that they could not get motivated to start work on assignments until the deadline was almost upon them; only then would the adrenaline run and they start to work! Others have informed me that they start gathering information the moment they get the assignment. At university, you may get given all your assignments and deadlines for a module together, with the same submission date. Then you need to prioritise your workload.

GATHERING AND SHARING INFORMATION

Using social media is perhaps the most common way in which you will share information with your fellow students. College lecturers and professors also use social media to communicate with students via podcasts, video, wikis and blogs for their classes.



Podcast

Audio content on a website that can be transferred onto an audio player, such as an iPod or other MP3 player.

Wiki

Information website that allows individuals to add, modify or delete web page content.

Blog

Discussion or informational site published on the world wide web.

The social media sites most widely used by students, to name just a few, are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. They can also be accessed via devices such as laptops, iPads, smartphones and other tablets. New media tools are constantly being developed to help students network, communicate and share information and knowledge with their peers. Social media may also be used by the university itself to showcase students' work as well as to promote events and pass on information to students.

USEFUL WEBSITES FOR NURSES

Universities will usually provide you with useful websites during your training to support you through your course. There are many computer software programs to assist students in their studies, such as referencing packages whereby you may just type in an author's name and initials and the correct referencing system is produced for you. Universities often also develop their own useful resources on referencing using the Harvard system for different types of source, such as books, journals, electronic media (e.g. television broadcasts), electronic sources (e.g. websites), publications by government and official bodies (e.g. Nursing and Midwifery Council, Department of Health) and others (e.g. newspapers) and you should take full advantage of this.

Table 1.2 gives some useful websites for nurses, from around the world.

Table 1.2 Useful nursing websites

Website	URL	Information
NurseZone	www.nursezone.com	Features, journals and information
Nurse.com	www.nurse.com	For adult nurses, midwives, community and all sectors of nursing
Forensic Nurse	www.theforensicnurse.com	Articles and news
PubMed	www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed	US government database for medical and health science resources
Medscape Nurses	www.medscape.com/nurses	News and resources
Nursing Times	www.nursingtimes.net	News, features and jobs
World Wide Wounds	www.worldwidewounds.com	Discusses dressings/materials, etc.
Allnurses	http://allnurses.com	Site for camaraderie and guidance
Nursing Link	http://nursinglink.monster.com	Nursing community that offers forums and education links
NurseConnect	www.nurseconnect.com	Network for career advancement
NurseGroups	www.nursegroups.com	Camaraderie in your nursing field
Forum for Nurses	www.nursingforum.co.uk	Learn about the different specialties in nursing
Nurses Reconnect	www.nursesreconnected.com	To liaise with your friends and peers in health care
Nursespage	https://twitter.com/thenursespage	Discussion site with blogs, etc.
Everyday Nurses	www.everydaynurses.com	Convene with your colleagues
NurseChat	www.facebook.com/pages/NURSE-CHAT	Talk about jobs, education and lots more

Website	URL	Information
AORN	www.aorn.org	Association of Perioperative Registered Nurses
Association of Rehabilitation Nurses	www.rehabnurse.org	Association of Rehabilitation Nurses
International Council of Nurses	www.icn.ch	Organisation promoting the profession of nursing and nurses
National Black Nurses Association	www.nbna.org	Organisation to promote black nurses
Cancer Nursing	www.cancernursing.org	For free courses, news and forum discussions
Medi-Smart	www.medi-smart.com	Site for nursing education resources
The Foundation Center for Nursing Research	www.ninr.nih.gov	US site for those wishing to pursue nursing research
SkillStat Learning	www.skillstat.com	Site full of learning tools
RN.com	www.rn.com	Continuing education and resources
ERNurse	www.ernurse.blogspot.com	Blog site for those in emergency nursing
Clinical Cases and Images	clinicalcases.org	Articles and interesting information
Nightingale Letters	www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/histtexts/flonight/index.html	Interesting information from Nightingale's letters
Care Plans	www.nhs.uk/Planners/Yourhealth/Pages/Careplan.aspx	Discussions about care planning
Nursing Ethics	www.nmc-uk.org/Publications/Standards/The-code/Introduction	Learn about codes of ethics and other useful information
Nursing Calculators	www.manuelsweb.com/nursing.htm	Calculators helping with working out drug dosages

(continued)

Table 1.2 *(Continued)*

Website	URL	Information
Clinical Calculators	www.mims.co.uk/Calculators/	Includes pregnancy due-date calculator and measurement converter
Nursing Theory	www.coxhealth.com/nursingtheoryandtheorists	Contains many nursing links
Medical Practice Guidelines	http://med.oxfordradcliffe.net/guidelines	Information on many medical conditions
Facts and Comparisons	www.factsandcomparisons.com	Looks at drugs and drug information
NursingFun	www.nursingfun.com	Jokes, games and nursing-related fun
School Nurse News	www.schoolnursenews.org	A good site for keeping abreast of all the news in this field of nursing

C-R-E-A-M STRATEGY

Cream is not just for cats! (Figure 1.1) Cottrell (1999) recommends the C-R-E-A-M strategy as a means of developing your study skills (Table 1.3).



Figure 1.1 CREAM is not just for cats

Table 1.3 C-R-E-A-M strategy

C = Creative	Have the confidence to use your individual strategies and styles and apply imagination to your learning
R = Reflective	Be able to sit with your experience, analyse and evaluate your own performance and draw lessons from it
E = Effective	Organise your space, time, priorities, state of mind and resources to the maximum benefit
A = Active	Be personally involved and doing things, physically and mentally, to help to make sense of what you learn
M = Motivated	Be aware of your own desired outcomes; keep yourself on track using short and long-term goals

Source: Cottrell (1999).

KEY POINTS

- Key differences between schools/colleges and university education
- The learning process
- Developing your learning skills
- Key terms for university
- Your nursing course
- Taking responsibility
- Practical arrangements
- Learning difficulties
- Deadlines
- Keeping going
- Social media and websites
- C-R-E-A-M strategy

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Here is a gentle activity for you.

Write your important dates on your yearly planner (at the back of this book). Write in shift dates (when they begin), assignment-submission dates, university dates, dates when you are giving presentations and one-to-one meeting with your tutor. Start to utilise this organisation tool.

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- Selwyn, N. (2007) The use of computer technology in university teaching and learning: a critical perspective. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* 23, 83–94.

Websites

National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare, www.nliah.wales.nhs.uk
Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), www.nmc-uk.org
Skills for Health, www.skillsforhealth.org.uk