
Academic Work: What to expect and what you must do

As an adult, you take responsibility for your own studies. Help and advice are offered in various forms, but there is no substitute for serious effort on your own behalf. The rewards for learning how to study, think and observe at the expected level are great. Consistent diligence in your studies may sometimes feel like hard work, but it is also exciting and liberating.

To make good use of the support and teaching offered by the College and the University, you must attend the teaching arranged for you. You are likely to find that the volume of material is considerably higher than at school, with a sharper transition than you may recall between GCSE and A-Levels, and you certainly cannot rely on last-minute revision as an adequate preparation for your exams, which will examine you on a whole year's work.

You will need to work for something like 40-45 hours a week (including all lectures, classes, supervisions and preparation) and your work must be your priority during Full Term. This is no longer than most people's working week. Most students find a balance between academic work and other activities, and it is important to do so.

Directors of Studies (DoS)

You will be assigned a Director of Studies for the year, appointed by the College, to oversee your academic work. They are subject specialists who will understand your Faculty and Tripos course.

Q: What can you expect your DoS to do for you?

- Schedule a meeting just before or at the start of each term to discuss courses, lectures, practicals or Faculty classes, detailed arrangements for supervisions, and generally discuss your work and answer any questions you may have.
- Discuss working methods in general with you on your first arrival.
- Check your examination entry (via CamSIS).
- Be available throughout the term for consultation (usually arranged by email).
- Meet you at the end of each term to review your supervision reports and any other issues arising from the term's work, and to advise you on any vacation work.
- Discuss with you your marks in University exams.
- In some cases, arrange a mock exam for you at the start of the second or third term.
- Write references on your behalf when you need them, subject to adequate notice (at least two weeks), and advise on future plans.
- Be aware of any recommendations contained in your Student Support Document (SSD), if you have one, and communicate these to your supervisors and lecturers.
- Treat what you say confidentially, in accordance with the College's Safeguarding Policy.

Q: What should you do for your DoS?

- Read your email regularly.
- Attend start and end of term meetings. This is a requirement.
- Read carefully all the material distributed to you by the College and by your Faculty or Department.



- Complete any forms promptly and accurately, and return them without delay to the appropriate place.
- Consult your DoS promptly about any difficulties you are having with your studies.
- Seek your DoS' advice on all academic matters including changes of papers or revision plans.
- Update your DoS on your career plans and developments.
- If requesting a reference, give adequate notice and provide a copy of the application.

University Lecture(r)s

The University is responsible for lectures and other forms of tuition. You should attend all tuition that is provided for the papers you have chosen. In some cases, attendance is compulsory.

Q: What can you expect of your lecture(r)s?

- An organised presentation of the course material – in most science courses, a more or less exhaustive presentation (if not always immediately digestible).
- Guidance as to what further reading is necessary, or what books present similar material.
- Care to ensure that the class is broadly following the lecture.
- Readiness to answer individual questions at the end of a lecture.
- Depending on the course and lecturer, handouts with more or less detailed notes, and sets of questions suitable for supervision work.
- Availability of material on a Moodle (or similar) site.
- An awareness of the education requirements set out in your Student Support Document (SSD), if you have one.

Q: What should you do in lectures?

- Attend, and pay attention.
- Write detailed notes summarising what is said, for later use with supervision work or exam revision, even if a handout appears to do this for you – there is no more effective way of fixing it in your mind.
- Do not make a recording of the lecture without permission from the lecturer. In many subjects, recordings are made available online.

You will not have time, in most cases, to rewrite more than a small proportion of your notes subsequently, or even to read through all your handouts towards the end of the year. You may like to try rewriting your notes during the vacations, when you might expect to condense them to a third of their original length by recording the main points, omitting anything of which you are already confident.

Support with effective note-taking skills and other study skills will be provided to students by the College. Information will be circulated by email in Michaelmas term.

Supervisions

Supervisions are arranged for you either by your DoS or your Faculty. They are provided to help you in your studies; examiners, not supervisors, test your abilities. However, supervisions will call for considerable preparation on your part – quite possibly the largest part of your time. At their best, they are the most useful part of the Cambridge system, and you should enjoy them as well as feeling you are making progress. If you feel either intimidated in supervisions, or consistently bored, then something is wrong. There will probably be a way of putting it right, as long as you talk to

someone about it. Your DoS will tell you how many supervisions you can expect from each supervisor; if you feel you need more as the term progresses, consult your DoS again.

You will usually see one or more supervisors on a weekly or fortnightly basis. In some subjects, supervising is one-to-one, but in most subjects there will be between two and four students at each supervision (occasionally more, in which case the supervision is more like a seminar). Many supervisions will take place at Newnham, but some may take place elsewhere, by negotiation between you and the supervisor. It is likely that your DoS will supervise part of your course themselves.

Q: What can you expect your supervisor to do for you?

- As far as is practicable, to give you a full hour of teaching.
- To encourage your involvement in the group.
- To explain how to prepare for supervisions.
- To set specific and reasonable written work to be done in advance, and to give you a clear means and deadline for its submission.
- Provided you hand it in by the agreed deadline, to read / correct / annotate your written work as appropriate before the supervision.
- To address your particular needs as well as the background of the topic being addressed (but you cannot expect to be spoon-fed for examinations: there is too much material to cover).
- To offer a constructive response to your questions and problems, and to show respect for your own ideas.
- To give advice on how to tackle the relevant examination paper(s).
- To offer on request the opportunity to talk in confidence about any problems you perceive in the supervisions or with your work.
- An awareness of the education requirements set out in your Student Support Document (SSD), if you have one.
- To submit a short individual supervision report on your work towards the end of each term. This is seen by your DoS and your Tutor, and your DoS will discuss it with you. These reports are submitted and stored in CamCORS, and you can read them yourself any time after your DoS has released them to you (accessible via your Raven password).

Q: What should you do for your supervisor?

- Complete the work set to the very best of your ability – consult other students about it by all means, but always write your own answer finally and make sure your supervisor knows if you have worked with someone else.
- Hand in your work on time.
- Contribute actively to the supervision, offering your ideas and opinions; a supervision is a two-way process, not a lecture, and supervisors respond better to someone who demonstrates enthusiasm for the subject.
- Turn up on time to every supervision.
- Contact your supervisor in good time if you can't make the supervision or can't complete the work set.
- Familiarise yourself with the College's, University's and Department's plagiarism policies.

You cannot expect your supervisor to rearrange a supervision to suit you, except in exceptional circumstances, but may try to negotiate this – preferably when the whole group is together at an earlier supervision; your supervisor may also need to negotiate alternative times occasionally.

For more details on how you will be taught, see the following University web page:

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/courses/how-will-i-be-taught>

Vacations

Vacations are a very important part of the academic year for Cambridge students. Although teaching is confined to the eight weeks of Full Term, vacations are an opportunity to consolidate the work you have done over the term and prepare ahead for the coming term. It is important to understand that you will not simply be able to revise in the short period immediately before the summer examinations.

Examinations

You are expected to sit examinations each year. Most examinations take place during the second half of the Easter (summer) Term, from mid-May to mid-June. Arts students often have a lighter timetable accommodating revision in the preceding weeks, but most scientists have their usual full timetable until a week or so before the exams.

Examinations can take a variety of formats. Your Director of Studies will advise you how to plan your revision strategy and on exam format which are often different to those you have previously experienced. In some cases, your Director of Studies may arrange for you to sit a mock exam, which may take place in January.

Though others will check your entry, it is up to you in the first instance to enter yourself for the right papers via CamSIS (when prompted, during Michaelmas Term). Cambridge marks examination papers and publishes the result unusually quickly – almost all by the end of June. You will be able to see your class and some further information on CamSIS. You can discuss your marks with your DoS. The distribution of marks at University level is different from what you will have experienced at school, so do discuss realistic expectations with your DoS.

At Cambridge, there is not usually the opportunity to re-sit your examinations, therefore if you fail overall, you will not normally be allowed to continue. See “What happens if I fail?” (LINK) for further information.

Prizes and scholarships are awarded to those students with the best results.