

Preparing for university and work life

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2nd year in English and Drama



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Hiya! I'm Rusty (they/them), and I'm a second year English and Drama student. Having grown up in one house for my whole life, starting at Royal Holloway was a pretty big adjustment, and I had to figure out how to balance work and taking care of myself for (pretty much) the first time. Moving to university for the first time can be daunting- you're living on your own for the first time, with new studies and responsibilities to manage.

Here are my suggestions for preparing to live by yourself at university, and making the most of your time there:

Learn to cook

As much as pesto pasta IS the infamous student meal, it's really miserable to live off of all the time and you won't be getting the nutrients you need. Get yourself a student recipe book (I used 'Nosh for Students') or look some up online, and find just a few that you'd like to make. If you have time, cook more than you need and freeze/refrigerate it for later – it'll save you hassle in the long run, and you'll be much more nourished. That being said, be nice to yourself! University is a busy time, and it's okay to live off pesto pasta every once in a while.

Get facebook (Also make sure to use all your other social media accounts!)

I know, nobody uses it. Except they actually do - a lot of societies at university DO use Facebook or Facebook Messenger for a lot of their communication - get yourself an account so you don't miss out on any important info. I created my own account specifically for university, and Messenger is the primary platform used by Dance Society (which I am part of) for all of our group chats. In fact, I would recommend using most social media platforms, as much as they're frowned upon. Our Student Union posts event information and more on their socials, and it's a good way of finding out what's going on around campus, as well as making it possible to find other people in your course or accommodation before university starts. Like it or not, we live in a digital age!

Do some research

I'm being deliberately vague here – research EVERYTHING you're curious about. Get to know the area, work out where to shop, where to work, where to relax, where to go out – anything that is important to you to know before you go. Look up your course – do you need to do any preparation work? Can you get ahead in your reading before you even start? Obviously, most of us don't want to work in our time off, so it's completely understandable if you don't go overboard with research, but if you have any concerns, look them up – I can guarantee you won't be the first person with these concerns.

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Figure out your work/life balance!

I quit my old job shortly after starting my first year because it didn't work with my timetable (I had a tutoring job which began at 4:30pm, and I usually hadn't finished classes by that point), was barely minimum wage, and was giving me more stress than money. I was lucky enough that I didn't need to work part-time during term last year, I just worked my holidays to make a bit of extra money. If this is feasible for you in your first year, I cannot recommend it more – I had plenty to adjust to and crammed my schedule with everything university had to offer, and my job was just not helping me anymore. If you do need a job while you're at university, I would recommend working locally, maybe even on campus, to minimise the amount of time you lose. There just aren't enough hours in the day for a long commute!

Use a calendar

This can take whichever form you like – you don't need to buy a physical calendar or diary and never use it. I used to think using a diary was the peak of organisation, but I would always forget it and then wouldn't be able to check it regularly. The calendar on your phone is fine, but there is always a lot going on at university, particularly early on, and you'll want to keep track of your time

Use the support available to you

There are people out there to help you – you may not be able to access all of these until you're at university, but it's always good to be aware of them. You will be assigned a personal tutor within your subject, whose job is to help you to get the most out of your course, and answer any queries you have whilst you're at university – they're mostly there for academic support, but you should be able to talk to them about anything you're comfortable with. The university should have an academic support service (ours is called CEDAS), disability and neurodiversity support (DNS), mental health services, and you can email your lecturers if you're struggling with any aspect of your course. Also, we use a system called Unibuddy where you can [ask any questions to current students](#) including me, so feel free to message me if you're interested!

BREATHE!

You've got this! Nobody has it all figured out when they start university, and in the next few years you'll learn a lot about yourself and what works for you - you'll learn and unlearn a lot, beyond your chosen course of study. Prepare for as much as you can, accept that you cannot prepare for everything, and enjoy the ride!