

TERTIARY STUDY IT'S NOT ABOUT HOW SMART YOU ARE!

Coming into tertiary education for the first time can be quite a daunting task.

If you are a new tertiary student reading this, you may be able to relate – but let me assure you, it isn't just about being 'intelligent' at academic work. Tertiary study is also about learning how to learn, discovering your tutor preferences, and implementing practical strategies to achieve assessments.

Many first-year students find tertiary education a challenge and a lot of that stress comes from past experience. There are usually many reasons:

- You may have learning difficulties from an early age.
- You may have done poorly at high school.
- You come from a family that has never been involved in tertiary education.
- You may have had 'problem' teachers.
- It may have been a decade or more since you sat in a classroom.
- The list can go on.

Any of these can lead to feelings of lowered confidence and self-esteem that are triggered as soon as you step inside that classroom environment. Whatever your past conditioning, however, don't worry – you can make it easier if you know a little inside information.

When I first started tertiary education at the age of 28, I had a lot of limited preconceived ideas about my academic abilities - based on a rather average high school performance. But I had a knack of finding ways of helping myself do as well as I could, as quickly as I could. Some of these, I will share with you now.

1. Decide on your purpose – the reason **Why** you are doing this. If you have a strong enough purpose, you will persevere when the going gets tough – and it will get tough!
2. Work out a **clear time-table** of study, work and other commitments as soon as possible. Not having enough time to get everything done is one of the biggest stresses students find. Also, it might be helpful to make a list of your possible distractions – (such as TV) and find ways to reduce them.
3. **Talk openly** to your tutors about any limiting academic concerns but assure them you are willing to do whatever it takes to do your best. Generally, they will appreciate your honesty and want to encourage and support you as much as they can.
4. Learn how to do correct in-text referencing and a reference list as early as possible. Get to a **learning skills advisor** or friend in their third year to get help with this. It is a *biggy* and you need to get your head around it from the start. There is software that will do it for you (like Endnote), but it is good for you to learn it as well.
5. Learn the technique (and it is a technique) of **how to write an essay** as early as possible. The biggest problem student's face when learning to write tertiary essays is working out how to gather information from many different sources and decide where in the essay it best fits. I

have devised a cunning plan to help this. It is called *Essay Route Mapping* and it is mentioned in my book *Passing Exams for Dummies*. There is also a download at the *Passing Exams* website.

6. Find information about **how memory works**. When it comes to exams, you will have to find creative ways to take in a huge amount of information, condense it and memorise it using specific memory techniques. I did a Masters Degree research project on how students' prepare for exams. I found a positive correlation between students who knew how memory worked and exam performance. It may sound obvious, but do YOU know how your brain and memory work? If you don't get a copy of my book.
7. There is a lot more awareness about **nutrition and learning**. A couple of tips: One, eat breakfast! If you are hungry you will not be able to concentrate. Two: Drink plenty of water throughout the day: If you are dehydrated, you will feel drowsy in class. (Try not to drink too many high sugar drinks like V. They don't do much for your brain development). Finally, if you are interested in taking supplements to aid brain development, get advice from a health food shop. They will advise Omega 3 (fish oil tablets) amongst others.

So, there are a few tips. I hope they will encourage you to take practical steps to kickstart your academic journey. Believe me, it isn't about how smart you are – it's about preparation and if you really want to get a good strategy in place – **use my 5-step approach** outlined in my book: *Passing Exams*. You will find a copy at your local bookstore.

