

## ACADEMIC STUDY

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### Part 1

What I am going to talk to you about today is in five stages. First of all I am going to talk about study support. Which is available for all students, not just international students, all 17,000 or whatever number of students we have on this campus. Secondly, the next thing I am going to concentrate on is language support. Now this is very specific for international students. We here at CALS offer *pre-sessional* support, what I am going to be talking about this morning is *in-sessional* language support, during the course. The third thing I 'm going to talk about is a very important thing, it's student counselling. Where do you go for - if you have problems? Now these may be personal problems, they may be to do with yourself, they may be to do with your family, they may be just that you are feeling 'down', feeling a bit depressed, lonely whatever. I will talk about that. And at Reading University this is considered a very important support service. After that I am going to talk about your future careers, the jobs you are going to do, after you have graduated. Now you might think well, we can't give you any advice because, here at Reading University, when you're from other countries, but you would be surprised at how much support you can get at Reading University, even to look for a job in your own country. And then finally I am going to spend a bit of time on talking about how to manage as an independent student because you know, the, one of the most important aspects of degree-level studying is to be able to manage your time independently, to study independently. So I will be talking about that, so I will be talking about five things. So first of all I am going to talk about study support.

At the university there is what we call a study support and development team, and I will direct you attention first of all down along the bottom here. By the way, I will be giving you handouts showing these slides later on, but do take notes. It's important. Down the bottom here you have an e-mail address, a website and a telephone number and you will notice they even give the international dialling code, so you can ring up when you are at home, back home on holiday and you need some advice. And this Study Support and Development Team these are some of the services they offer. First of all individual appointments. It's a bit like when you come to see your personal tutor. You arrange an appointment and you can meet one of the study support team and discuss whatever you wish to discuss with them. Whether it's about whatever aspect of your study it might be. For example you might be doing some work and you need to carry out statistical analysis, of the data that you've collected. And this may be causing you a problem, and you are not sure how to do it. So you could go to the Study Support Team and they'd give you advice about this. They have a range of expertise on this.

Also the Study Support Team provides study guides, a whole range of them and these can be accessed via the website, the study support website. They also run what we call *workshops* for developing academic skills and these are advertised on the website. Workshops are like classes where various students who are interested in a particular type of study problem work together, with advisers, helping them to develop skills to deal with any problem they might have.

## Part 2

Another thing which the Study Support Team provides, is what we call dyslexia assessment. I have given you a definition here of what exactly dyslexia is, some of you will be aware of this. It's a syndrome which caused, which has become, there is much more awareness of it in the past 20 or 30 years. So I'll read out that definition. *Dyslexia is a medical condition affecting the brain that makes it difficult for someone to read and spell words correctly.* And this definition has come from the MacMillan English Dictionary which I encourage you to use.

Now I'm particularly interested in dyslexia because my own son is dyslexic, he is a certified dyslexic and when he was young this affected his studying quite seriously. And once we realised that he was an intelligent boy, but he was having a problem learning we had to find out what it was. We managed to find out that he was suffering from dyslexia, and he was given support throughout his secondary school life, and now he a doctor, a medical doctor so this dyslexia didn't affect his studies or his career and he has done brilliantly. So, you know, if you have a problem with spelling, or reading, even in your own language it's possible you could be dyslexic, a lot of people are. And there are lots of ways of dealing with this problem.

Now moving on still talking about the Study Support System they have a mission, and I think it's important to look at this mission, I have written it up here *to help students take control of their own learning development by giving advice and information suited to each individual.* So what that means is that they take you case by case. Everybody's unique, they have their own particular problems and the Study Support Team appreciates this and tries to deal with you as an individual, not just a number. They give support in things like essay writing and structuring where you might say 'well I've been on the pre-sessional why do I need this support for essay writing and structuring - of essays?' And the answer is probably you won't, if you have been a good student and made good progress, but still it can be a problem. So the advice is there with this team.

They give you advice about exam preparation, now this can be important for some students. It could be about, you know, how to manage your time, or how to memorise stuff, you know you've got a lot to remember, or how to select what to learn for the exam, so how to predict what will be in an exam, it will give you lots of advice in this area.

Next, it can deal with motivation. Now – what is motivation? Ok, well motivation is what makes you get up and go to do something. If you weren't motivated in the morning, to come to CALS what would you do? Well you would lie in bed, listen to your MP3 player, get on the old mobile, text a few people, you know, you wouldn't be motivated to come to work. What motivates you is because you know that if you come to CALS you are going to be taught, you are going to develop your English skills, and that is going to help you in future. So that's a form of motivation. The fact that you know that by working hard now, you will do better in the future. That's what motivation is.

You need to be motivated and when you are studying on your academic course, sometimes maybe you will have very few lectures during the week, or you will have so much work, that you find that you can't cope with all the work. So what you do is you do nothing. And you know that you have got lots of work to do, but you don't do it, because it's all piling up, I've been there, I know. If you feel that you need to be motivated and you are finding it difficult

to motivate yourself then going along to the Study Support Team and they will give you some advice on how to deal with this problem.

### **Part 3**

Time management and organisation of course is another very important area. Managing your time with lots of different courses and classes going on and lots of assignment deadlines to meet. You are already experiencing that here on the pre-sessional this week. You've got TEEP and you've got the conference and you've got the third draft of the project to hand in - you know what I mean.....And managing your time in a realistic, sensible and clear-headed way is a real skill which hopefully you have learnt already. If you haven't, again you can get support, as you can with other areas of study – I won't go into those in any detail.

What do the Study Guides do, which are useful? Well, I've picked out a few things, time management and organisation, there are written Study Guides, as well as individual advice from actual people. And exam preparation, written out as well as having advice from individual people. Looking at these two here, these are things that probably you haven't covered on the pre-sessional course, like poster presentations, how to prepare a poster rather than a power point presentation. That would be useful advice you could get there, or you could get advice on writing reports, like lab reports, for example, if you are going to be working in a laboratory, or possibly a report on some sort of data collection that you have done, that sort of advice is available.

Now I'm going to move on. I've talked about study support, now I am going to move on to language support. I.E.S.P. that's important. Insessional English Support Programme. That goes on in this building, well it does at present. There will be some extensions to this building, and I think it will be going on in the extensions later in the year but you will be advised about this. And the person responsible, the head of the I.E.S.P. Unit is Andy Seymour, who has got an office down on the ground floor of this building and in fact he will be giving you a lecture on a topic in Block 2 of the Pre-sessional, so you will get to know who he is.

And, so what does I.E.S.P. provide? Well first of all there is a website to visit and you can find out a lot from that website. What is available are classes, these are usually available on Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Thursday afternoons and each class usually lasts two hours. And there are classes in Academic Writing, Academic Speaking, Listening and there are also language laboratory sessions where you can, of course, obviously work on your pronunciation skills or your listening skills. Also very importantly down here is the Advisory Writing Service. Well what is the Advisory Writing Service? It is a service which is available usually during the summer months and the spring months – March, April, May, June. And it's available at the time when you are writing your dissertations and your theses and your projects and you need advice, about, you know, similar sort of advice to the advice you get in your project class now but you can take a draft of your work to the Advisory Writing Clinic and, they won't mark it for you, they won't correct it for you or anything like that, but they will give you advice about how you could organise it, organise your notes, so that is well worth knowing about.

Ok, if you are an international student you are entitled to I.E.S.P. support if you are a full fee-paying student, I think most of you are. Otherwise it's £70.00 per term I am not quite sure what the situation is with E.U. students on this. I was trying to find out whether you

have to pay the £70.00 or whether you get I.E.S.P. support for free, but that can be checked through the website or contacting Andy Seymour.

#### **Part 4**

In order to have classes there has to be at least eight students. It's not practical to have fewer than eight students in a class because Andy Seymour has to pay his teaching staff. Lessons, they go on for eight weeks, so say for example you are going for Listening and Speaking classes for eight weeks per term, that's sixteen hours, sixteen hours per term that's not a great deal. Sixteen hours per term, well you do more than sixteen hours a week on a Pre-sessional so don't expect miracles from the I.E.S.P. language programme. What it's doing is providing what we call 'consolidation' to consolidate means to support what you have already learnt for example on the re-sessional course. Or it may deal with certain aspects of language which cause the most problems with international students. Ok so I've talked about study support, I've talked about language support, now I am going on to counselling.

Early in the term most of you came for a lecture by Shanaz Raven do you remember her? She is a student counsellor, she's an international student counsellor and Shanaz, as you know she's a very sympathetic lady, she's very experienced. She was a student here at Reading University many years ago, she's from Mauritius which is a tiny island in the Indian Ocean and she came here. She's been through all the problems, she has faced all the difficulties which many of you face during your time when you are studying in a foreign country. But she's part of a team and this includes the study advisory team and there are also what we call support officers and associates. The associates are people who are actually studying counselling and they sort of give voluntary support to the whole team. Normally you would be dealing, if you need counselling, you would be dealing with a professional fully qualified counsellor. There is an appointment system, you can't just - well you can go there and they will arrange an appointment. Or you can go to your personal tutor who will ring up and arrange for an appointment if you feel you need counselling. I did mention earlier what counselling is. Counselling is all about dealing with problems for example you may just simply lack motivation, you just can't get motivated. You may feel stress, you know stress is often a cause for you to go and get counselling. And these people are very good at knowing how to help you if you are feeling stress.

One problem for people living in a foreign land studying through a foreign language amongst a bunch of native speaking students is loneliness. The counselling service can help you to deal with being lonely. Loneliness can be brought on by the fact that you feel alienated against the people, the country that you are living in, the system that you're working in, it's a natural instinct. Loneliness can be caused by feeling homesick, or loneliness can be caused by the fact that you simply find it difficult to make friends. Everybody feels lonely at times. The student counselling service can help you get through that. What the counselling service does is it provides confidentiality. I will explain this word. Confidentiality is anything that you say to the student counsellor is completely private between you and the counsellor. It will not be reported, it won't even be recorded, the counsellor may not even write anything down unless you agree. So that's what confidentiality means, so don't be scared to go and talk to your student counsellor if you feel the need. Often you feel a lot better afterwards, students have told me this. I personally have sent students to Shanaz in the past, nearly every year and they have come back feeling better, more relaxed, more self-confident, even less lonely. They provide advice leaflets and also they provide what is called 'peer support'. Now peer support, the word peer, you know you're all peers, you are all fellow students and

they suggest ways of you making friends, building up a team of people who support each other, students, fellow students.

## Part 5

Ok, so I've talked about counselling, I've talked about language support, I've talked about study support now what about – you're getting towards the end of your Masters degree, or your Foundation course, or your Undergraduate degree – and all of a sudden you start thinking 'hey in a couple of months time I am not going to be a student any more. I won't be able to go back to Mummy and Daddy and say 'give me money so I can live at home and enjoy life.' I'm going to have to find a job and work like that. It's a bit of shock I vaguely remember this myself. Thinking, 'I have to go and find a job and earn money.' And this is where the Careers Advisory Services comes in. Career, a career is what you are going to do in the future whether you are going to be an engineer or a rocket scientist or a doctor or a computer wiz kid or whatever maybe you are going to be a, I don't know, professional footballer, you know like Mohammed or something like that. What you can do is to visit the careers advisory website. When it says post-graduate that applies to everybody. Once you have graduated, once you have passed your course, you are postgraduates. That is what 'post' means 'afterwards,' 'after graduation.' So, when we talk about postgraduates, even foundation students, once you have completed your foundation course, you have graduated.

Now first of all, they have drop-in sessions, drop-in, drop-out. 'Drop-in' means just 'turn up,' you know, whenever. 'I need advice about my career, can you help me?' And very often they can give you advice on the spot at that moment, when you arrive without any appointment. Now what's particularly important I suppose is this website, it says international, because you are international students and this bit is what I mentioned right in the beginning of the talk, is advice for students staying in the U.K., those of you who want to stay in the U.K., how do you go about it? How can you work in the U.K.? How long can you do it? How can you get a work permit? What do you do about your visa? Most of you, obviously, don't want to stay in the U.K. you want to go back to your own countries, I mean you know that's where you belong that's where you want to live obviously. And surprisingly, you can get advice about careers in your own country which I think is particularly useful. So, don't forget, when you're thinking about your future career at some stage, even now, you can go along to the careers advisory service and start the ball rolling. You know, don't think that'll take care of itself later when I am grown up when I have passed all my exams. And so, the careers advisory service website has lots of useful links about work permits, a prospects web, 'prospects' means 'job prospects,' and 'job prospects' means what possibilities are there for jobs? And also, it gives you links to higher education and research opportunities. And particularly research opportunities should be of interest to some of you. You know, you might want to stay in the U.K. or you might want to go home, and work on further research in your subject area or something, maybe you want to go on a PhD, for example.

And if you are non-EU student, you can call into the student advice centre in the Students' Union, in membership services in the Students' Union. And they can give you some useful advice. So, it's very useful to know that that service is there. Quite a number of students tend to forget this or are never aware of it. You are a University of Reading student, make use of all the support and advice you can get, you are entitled to it. That's why you pay your fees, as well as to learn your subject, and develop your English, etc.

## **Part 6**

OK, so I've talked about four things now. I've talked about study support, language support, counselling, and careers; you know what you do after you have left when you are no longer a student. Finally, I want to talk about being an independent learner. You know the system here in the U.K. universities is, very much, the emphasis is very much on the student to take control of their own learning, don't be expected to be told what to do all the time by lecturers or professors; it just doesn't happen. In many departments. They give you the work, they give you the reading list and they say 'get on with it'. Come back and do the exams, basically. That's life, this is the reality of it. So luckily, fortunately for you, you have had the good sense to come here on the pre-session course, not just to develop your English skills and level, but also to develop your study skills and awareness of how to cope on an academic course using a foreign language. My advice to you is; practise what's been taught. Now you have spent nine weeks, or maybe you have spent three terms here at Reading University, at CALS learning stuff. Don't forget to use what you have learnt. The whole point of you learning that stuff is so that you can put it into practice on your academic course. For example if you have got a big chunk of reading to do, and I mean several 100 pages know why you are reading before you start reading. Know what your reading purpose is so that you can select carefully the bits that are going to be useful, don't follow every line with your finger and try to work out the meaning of every word, spending most of your time with your electronic translator. No, spend your time usefully finding – O.K. I am going to read pages 1-5 and 20-30 and then I'm going to miss a lot of pages and I am going to read pages 100 -120 and so on, be selective.

Also avoid plagiarism. We've really pushed this and the Universities are very strict about plagiarism, not just with international students by the way, but with native speakers, British students as well. If you plagiarise you will be penalised heavily. The important thing that you have to remember is that there are very sophisticated detection methods now to detect plagiarism. Information technology is very, very sophisticated. If you plagiarise you will be found out, not just through the use of the language but through this detection service disc or whatever is used. Remember you have been taught how to take lecture notes and you will continue to do so when you are on Block 2, take those lecture notes in the same way. You have been taught how to discuss and how to be involved in seminars and you will continue to be taught this skill during the preceding pre-sessionals. Many of the British students don't have this skill, they are not taught at school, they are not taught how to participate effectively in seminars, you have been. So you're at an advantage. Make sure that you use that advantage. Very important – don't miss lectures or seminars. Looking around I think only one or two people have missed today, hopefully, that I can see. One of them was warned yesterday, he obviously didn't listen to them. It's always a bad idea. Don't use the excuse 'I stayed up till 4 o'clock studying' as a reason for missing a lecture or a seminar - I am going to talk about that in a minute.

## **Part 7**

Develop a 'buddy' system. Do you know what a buddy is – a friend, yes, an American term 'hey buddy, my buddy, my friend, my pal. Work together as a team, after your lecture look at your notes together, share information. It doesn't just have to be with other international students try and develop a buddy system with British students if there are British students in your class, they'll appreciate it as much as you. This buddy system will help you to fill gaps in your knowledge, what did you miss in a lecture, either because you didn't understand the language or because you fell asleep, like one or two people are doing

right now. As I said don't forget to make full use of study guides and advisors, it's your right as a student and also of course I.E.S.P.

Now I'm going to talk to you in a fatherly way. I want you to be sensible because studying is an extremely important part of your life but health is an extremely important part of your life. If studying affects your health you will not study well, your studying will be impaired. If you don't take time to relax, if you don't take time to exercise you will suffer the consequences, either now during your studies, or in later life, because you have been developing bad habits which is very easy to continue into your career. Getting that very high mark is not worth a heart attack when you are forty.

And also things like diet, think about what you are eating. They say that in order to improve your concentration you should drink a lot of liquid, fluid, water in particular, especially in these conditions where you have fairly warm airless rooms maybe air conditioning going. Make sure that you take on lots of fluid at regular intervals not lots at one go. I am not talking about pints of beer here I am talking about pints of water. So that for example is very simple advice, but it's good advice 'cos it certainly helps your concentration. I found this in the afternoons sometimes when I am working in my office and I am in front of my computer. My concentration starts to go. What I do then is I go and get a glass of water and I sip it, drink it down, and I find that helps. It's not just good for your health it's actually good for your concentration and keeps you awake. Then I have this motto here, and I, I actually stick to this I have got to say. 'I believe in working long hours but I don't believe in working late hours'. So what I am saying is I am quite prepared to get up at 5.30 in the morning and work until 7 or 8 o'clock at night but I am not prepared to work until 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. You are never going to produce your best work like that. You are going to be exhausted, it's going to have a bad effect on your studies, and it's going to have a bad effect on your long term health. I have a friend named, well I won't tell you his name, who was doing a Masters degree at the same time that I was here in Reading University, some 25/30 years ago. He got into the habit of working right through the night in order to finish, to complete his thesis, and the way he did this, to keep awake, was to drink black coffee. Subsequently he suffered from insomnia for the rest of his life. He has to take sleeping tablets every single night in order to get to sleep. That was 30 years ago and he is still to this day suffering the consequences, so don't get into that habit if you can just try and avoid it. I mean he was only doing it for a few months, he became addicted to black coffee and also he couldn't sleep. When the exams were finished, the dissertation was submitted, he got his degree, what happened was he then tried to relax and he couldn't, he could not sleep at night.

## **Part 8**

Now language self study - I've compiled a list of things that I would advise students to use, I am sure that Joan and Norma can also offer other titles. Don't worry about writing these down as I have them on a paper I am going to give to all of you in a minute. This book, Ewings is I think the new 'Advanced Grammar in Use with Answers', always go for 'with answers' because these are self study, you do the work and then you check the answers. Don't check the answers first and then do the work, that doesn't work. Always do the work first and then check the answers. This is a slightly lower level book but again it is good 'with answers'. I am a great believer in using a good dictionary, having a good paper dictionary for two reasons, firstly a good paper dictionary obviously – well three reasons actually, it gives you definitions and a range of definitions but you think, you can get in an electronic dictionary but it also helps you to pronounce words. Once you have learnt the phonemic alphabet which most of you have been studying in class and becoming familiar with, you

look at a new word, you use your dictionary, you know how to pronounce it you don't have to go and ask the teacher or find an English person to tell you how to pronounce it. Don't forget to use a dictionary like that. Also very importantly for a dictionary like MacMillan, it gives you word frequency. In other words – is it high frequency, is it a common word which is used by a lot of English speaking people native speakers, or is it low frequency? - And that can be an important thing for you to decide, whether to learn this word or not, whether that's a useful word for me to learn. If it's high frequency then obviously it is. If it's low frequency maybe not, it depends on what you are studying, what your needs are. You are mature enough to make that decision. So don't forget to make use of self-study guides and dictionaries.

I'm now coming to the end of my talk and it's a good opportunity for me to talk to you today because actually I won't be here on Friday which is the last day of your Pre-session course. So I won't be able to talk to you after the end of the conference. Ros Richards, the Director of CALS, will be talking to you, so I am going to wish you 'good luck in your future studies. A lot of you I am going to be seeing around because you are going to be doing Block 2 or you are going on to the Foundation Programme. One or two of you might even go onto Block 4 which I will be directing later in the summer. I am also going to tell you, don't forget your teachers and friends in CALS, your friends are your fellow students these people here. You will see each other round the campus and I am sure you have developed a good bond between yourselves already. Talk to your teachers when you see them, Joan and Norma and myself, we are here all the year round and always happy to speak to you again. After a while - Joan won't do this, Norma won't do this - but I will forget your name, sometimes. Always remember your face, I'm very good with faces I always know that I know somebody but I am not good at names. So if I start talking to you and I haven't said your name after 3 or 4 minutes you can say what your name is, just to remind me. Do come back and see us sometime, anytime.