



Academic Tips for “Mature” Students

Age is just a number. Whether you are 25, 40, or 70, a mature student is someone who has come to university after at least one year of not being in school. You may be starting a new career path, going to university for the very first time, or upgrading previous skills. You may be single, in a relationship, have children (and grandchildren!). No matter what your background, you have made the decision to come back to school, and we are here to help you succeed! Read below for some tips for mature students, and please attend a (FREE) workshop or book a (FREE) one-on-one study coach session (see information at www.dal.ca/sfs).

- **Know that this new routine will take time.** Don't get discouraged by the end of September if you are still struggling school, work, and family life! It's going to take some time for everyone involved to get adjusted, as well as taking the time it will take to...
- **...figure out how you learn.** If it's been a while since you have been in school, a lot of things may have changed. New technologies, new ways of writing essays, new testing styles, etc. Do you need to rewrite your notes every day? Do you need to recite things out loud? Use computer for notes versus pen and paper? It may take you a few weeks to get into a good learning routine.
- **Go in with the knowledge of the advantages you have as a mature student.** Your work and life experiences may help you to better understand the contents of the courses you are taking (e.g. studying cases of real-life situations). Be confident, not scared!
- **Know your limits.** Taking three classes is still considered full time, and is significantly less demanding than five classes per semester. If you have been out of the academic game for a long time, or have a job and family commitments, perhaps baby steps are needed for this new life choice!
- **Use time management techniques you have already been using (and might not have even realized it!)** Don't reinvent the wheel just to do what everyone else is doing. On the same line...
- **...use your work ethic.** Just because you haven't been in the academic game for a while doesn't mean you don't already have the right skills for studying that you see the younger students doing.





- **Know what resources are available for you, and use them!** You may need a refresher for all the new academic skills and tools out there. Maybe you have never researched for an essay before. Maybe you have never used Excel. Maybe you have never had a multiple choice test. Maybe you have never used APA format. From library reference services, to the writing centre, to study skills, and your TAs and professors, take advantage of the help that is out there, and never be ashamed to ask for help!
- **Set aside specific times (and places, if possible) for school work.** Also, be specific about what you will be doing. Just writing down “Study time” for four hours on Thursday afternoons isn’t as effective as writing out dedicated times, locations and topics. Specify times for readings, assignments, note reviews and test studying. For example, write out “Work on Stats 1060 assignment at the Math Stats Learning Centre Wednesday 1-2:30” or “Review BIOL 1010 lectures every Thursday from 6-7:30 PM.”
- **Start early.** Due to the time it may take you to get back in the groove, think about purchasing your text books early, and going through course outlines whenever they are available (feel free to email your professor for an old syllabus or any advice on what to do to get started for the term). This way, you will be ahead of the game if things are more challenging than you anticipated, or unexpected events occur that take away from your weekly study time.
- **Be proactive with communication.** Talk to your boss at your current job about flexibility with hours. Take the time to meet with your professors before the term starts and explain your situation. Going back to school is a big step, and your supervisors/professors/spouses, etc., are here to support you and are usually understanding of the new situation you are in, and may share resources or experiences with you that will help you succeed.
- **Get clarification on assignments/tests early.** Make sure you completely understand the logistics of every assignment/essay/test. What you previously understood as the proper referencing style may not be what the professor expects for the essay. It’s much better to have everything clear from the get-go than to unnecessarily lose valuable points!
- **Don’t compare yourself with other students.** You may feel like an “outsider” in class with all the younger students, but you are all here for the same reason. Don’t dwell on your different learning styles, different slang, different hobbies or different appearances.





→ **Don't judge, or be judged!** Don't assume that your time is more precious than other students. Yes, you may have a family, job, or other commitments, but so could they. Don't assume your time is more valuable. Additionally, realize that you don't need to alienate yourself from the younger students! You have a lot of experience to share, so share it! A lot of time, younger students will gravitate to the mature students in the class because of what mature students can bring to group work, etc.

→ **For students with children...**

- Talk to your professors from the beginning. Ask about back-up plans in case one of your kids gets sick (can you catch up on class material on your own? Can you bring your child to class?...)
- Find a kid-friendly location on campus. Maybe book a study room, or find empty classrooms where your kids can be safely contained without disrupting other students who are studying.
- Study with your family! Every weeknight, sit around the kitchen table together for an hour or so. Make the new schedule of learning fun, but effective!

Last but not least, **be confident!** You made the decision to come back to school for a reason--- and you have been accepted and are here! Aim for your best, but don't dwell on perfection. Talk with your peers, professors, campus resources, and your friends and family. We are all here to help you succeed!

