

Learning Online @ UL

This short guide sets out some guidelines and considerations to give you, the student, a stronger sense of what to expect to successfully engage with remote online or blended learning at UL.

While all learning experiences, whether remote online, blended or in a traditional face-to-face classroom, will share common core elements such as students, lecturers, learning resources, and assessments, how you interact with these elements in a remote online or blended learning environment will be quite different.

Information on the following is provided for students who are new to this way of learning:

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What is remote online or blended learning?



Remote online or blended learning refers to teaching and learning that happens at a distance from the University campus that you can access wholly or partially online from an internet enabled device.

As an online student you are expected to take control of your own academic studies. You will have to fit your studies in with your work, family and social life. This will take commitment, self-motivation, and time management skills on your part.

What technology will I need to engage effectively?



For a successful remote online or blended learning experience, it is recommended that you at least have ready access to

1. a good quality laptop or desktop computer, preferably one that's not too old or slow for your studies, and
2. a good quality internet connection

This type of learning will require you to access academic materials on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) using your internet connection.

Sometimes, access will be at the same times as your peers, tutors and lecturers (this is known as *synchronous* or real-time learning), other times, access will be at the time that you decide is suitable for you to do it (this is known as *asynchronous* or non-real-time learning).

You may need to download study materials and resources from the VLE onto your own device, meaning that you will need adequate storage space to accommodate this on the device you plan to use.

Where can I access my learning online?



Your online learning at UL will be hosted on a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) - either Sulis or Moodle. Information and resources about your programme and modules will be available to you on the VLE. It's also a good idea to check your student email regularly once you have set it up.

First steps: Logging into the VLE and accessing your programme site

You will be given instructions on how to log into your VLE. When you log in for the first time, you will see a *Programme Site* representing your chosen programme of study. Navigate to this site firstly upon your initial login. Take your time to browse it and read it carefully and thoroughly. Take this early opportunity to update your VLE profile, perhaps add a profile picture and a few sentences about yourself to let your peers know about you. Your Programme Site will also contain helpful resources to inform you how to update your VLE preferences including time zone, language, and email notifications.

When you log in the first time, remember that your programme director or lecturers may not be there at the exact same time to immediately welcome you - as they would be in a traditional face-to-face classroom setting. Therefore, it

is important that you thoroughly navigate the Programme Site and any *Module Sites* you have access to (you will only be able to access your Module Sites after you complete registration – follow [registration guidelines here](#)). Use this time to familiarise yourself with the way your remote online or blended learning environment is set up and structured so that you can get started straight away on the correct footing.

On a weekly basis, you will be expected to devote a number of hours to the programme you have chosen to study. Your lecturers will guide you on their expectations on effort required within their modules.

How can I access my modules?



To access your *Module Sites* on the VLE, you will firstly need to complete registration during academic Week 1. Follow [registration guidelines here](#).

Once you have successfully registered you will be able to gain access to them on the VLE. Shortly after registering, log back into the VLE and check that your modules are all listed and accessible to you.

Explore them to familiarise yourself with the structure and navigation of each and to find out as much as you can. Remember your modules may not be identical to one another, they may look, feel and operate differently. This is at the discretion of your lecturers so take time to acclimatise yourself to each module.

In the first instance, seek out:

- Opportunities to introduce yourself – lecturers may ask you and your peers to post to a discussion forum to introduce yourselves.
- Information about each module - the module and assessment outlines, assessment due dates, schedule of activities, etc.
- The structure of each module - modules may be broken down and sequenced in a weekly or topics-based structure i.e. Week 1, Week 2, etc; or, Topic 1: The Cell, Topic 2: The Nucleus, etc.
- The elements that comprise each week or topic – discover what learning resources and materials will be available to you, if online or face-to-face classes are scheduled, how you will communicate with your peers, the individual and/or group activities you will engage in, etc.
- What your lecturer’s preferred means of communication with them is - some prefer to communicate using a discussion forum or chat message on the VLE Module Site, others may prefer communication by email.

How will I submit coursework and assessments?



As mentioned above, one of the first things to do when you access your module sites on the VLE is to look for an assessment outline – if there is not a standalone one available, it may be contained in the module outline.

It will provide you with clear information about when coursework and assessments will be issued, due for submission by, etc. The coursework and assessments you are asked to undertake will contribute towards

your final grade for your module. It is important to familiarise yourself with all coursework and assessment requirements as they are described.

The type of online coursework and assessments you engage with on each module will be at the discretion of the lecturers and may vary somewhat from module to module. However, you will submit most if not all of your coursework and assessments to dedicated submission areas on your VLE module sites.

For legitimate reasons, if you foresee yourself being unable to submit coursework or an assignment at the date or time designated to do so, or if there is another legitimate reason impeding your ability to submit your work, you should contact the lecturer as soon as possible to let them know, using their available contact information.



Sometimes, your lecturer may refer to online coursework, and sometimes assessments, as *E-tivities*.

How should I behave online?



As a student, it’s important to recognise that your remote online or blended learning environment is a space for academic studies. In a similar way to your studies in a traditional face-to-face classroom, respectful and appropriate behaviours are expected when you communicate with your peers and lecturers online, be that in discussion forums, live chats, audio or video-based environments, etc.

On your Programme site, you should find a [code of online etiquette](#) (*‘Netiquette’*) that all UL students are expected to

follow. You should read these guidelines in full and follow them in your online engagements with others.

Here's a snapshot of some general guidelines to ensure respectful, polite and knowledgeable online communications between you, your peers, tutors, and lecturers:

- Treat others as you would like to be treated - behave respectfully, use appropriate language, and acknowledge other people's privacy interests.
- Avoid writing in all capital letters AS IT CAN BE INTERPRETTED AS SHOUTING.
- Don't use text-speak, abbreviations, slang or foul language.
- Do a spelling and grammar check before posting.
- Be cautious when using humour or sarcasm as tone can sometimes be lost in online communication without visual and audible cues and your message might be taken seriously or as offensive.

How do I communicate with my lecturer, tutors and peers?



We learn well by making connections. Sometimes, remote online or blended learning can feel isolating, therefore, engaging and communicating with your lecturers, tutors and peers on a regular ongoing basis is key to succeeding.

Your lecturers will likely have set up some ways for you to communicate with everyone on the module - read each of your module sites carefully for instructions about ways to communicate within them. If you're unsure, ask. A direct email to the lecturer and/or tutors can often be the best option if you're unsure about something.

Some Tips

Context matters:

Before you post, double check to ensure you are making a post in the right place and in the right way.

For example, if you want to contact your lecturer or tutor about a personal matter that you do not want to be visible to your peers, it's best to send them a direct email or a private message on the VLE. Don't post this to a discussion forum where it will be visible to your peers.

Contact your Lecturer:

For module level enquiries contact your lecturer. Commonly, in the module information area of each module, lecturers will state how they prefer you to communicate with them. Follow this guidance.

If you want to post a general module enquiry to your lecturer which your peers might also benefit from seeing a response to (e.g. a question about an assessment), look for a general module Q&A discussion forum to post to.

Questions about weekly material:

If you want to pose a question about weekly material or a topic covered on your module that either your lecturer or your peers could respond with an answer to, look for designated discussion forums within the week or topic that your question is relevant to. If you're unable to locate a discussion forum or space to ask your lecturer a question, a direct email to the lecturer can often be the best option. They may even set up a discussion forum space if you request it.

Contact Course Director:

For programme level enquiries, navigate to your Programme Site. There will likely be a similar Q&A discussion forum available there to address any programme level questions to.

How can I stay connected and be 'visible' in my online interactions?



Staying connected and being 'visible' in a remote online or blended learning context will require your regular active participation. You will be expected to be regularly active on all of your modules.

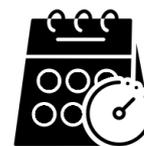
You can do this by

- accessing and interacting with all online resources and materials on your module,
- posting and replying to comments in discussion forums and chats,
- attending and being present in your synchronous online class sessions,
- responding to the lecturers prompts and questions in a synchronous online class session when asked, and
- completing tasks, activities, and assessments you have been assigned with.

Your lecturers and tutors will be able to see your activity on the VLE to check that you are maintaining pace with the module or if you are falling behind.

There may be times when you are expected to communicate asynchronously, or not in "real-time", for example by posting comments and responses to a discussion forum; and synchronously, in "real-time", for example in a live online class lecture or tutorial. Depending on the way your lecturer wants interaction to happen, you may be asked to use a text chat area, your microphone, or your webcam video. Be prepared for this.

How can I manage my time and self-regulate my workload?



During your programme you will continuously encounter coursework that will require you to engage with resources and material, your lecturers, and with your peers, online.

Be strategic and set a schedule. The importance of being able to set aside adequate time for tasks, to manage how you spend your time, and to self-regulate your learning in a remote online or blended learning context is vital.

In traditional face-to-face teaching, lectures and tutorials are often set for a predetermined period at a given location. In remote online or blended learning experiences, when you decide to access your module sites and where you access them from, can largely be left up to you.

This freedom and flexibility can be a great advantage to many, however, for some it can also be quite challenging. In order to get your module work done, it's important that you endeavour to keep up with the pace of them and to appropriately manage your own time. Work can begin to pile up as a result of not regularly checking in with your Programme and Module Sites.

Some simple actions to help you to manage your time efficiently could be to set up and use an online calendar and/or a study scheduler to help you to track the tasks you need to work on and the time you need to spend on your studies.

Tools such as these allow you to designate time on a daily basis to check in with each of your modules, and

importantly, to keep track of and follow through on any individual and group tasks and activities that you have been assigned in your studies. Setting this up for your studies as early as you can could save you and your peers some anxiety and frustration.

How can I create conditions to learn remotely?



If possible, set up a dedicated study environment or space for yourself. If you can set up or rearrange a physical space in your home, do. Make it comfortable for your studies. If that is not possible, then find somewhere you feel relaxed at home that has a decent connection to the internet and make it feel like a good place to be. A place where you can get some work done online, and interact with your lecturers, tutors and peers if you need to do that.

Remember, be patient



Remote online or blended learning is a different way of learning and may take some time to get accustomed to. This may be your first time experiencing it, you may already have some experience with it, or you may not have studied for a number of years. Everyone is coming to UL with different experiences.

Where do I go for IT support?



UL has an IT Student Support service (ITSS). You can request IT support by

1. Logging a support call online at <https://ul.ie/itss>
2. Emailing your support request to ITSS@ul.ie