



# Advice for Students Starting Their Bioscience Course

What are you expecting when you start your bioscience course? What do you hope to gain from it? Interested in some insider tips on how to get on in your course and at your university or college?

This guide is intended to give you some ideas, hints and tips on how to get the most out of your bioscience course, not just focusing on studying but also making sure you spend time relaxing and enjoying your time at university or college. All the advice is from students on bioscience courses, from Marine Biology to Biomedical Science, Biochemistry and Zoology.

## Top tips

- Go to all your lectures, practicals, tutorials, seminars...
- If you don't understand something from a lecture or practical, ask questions. Lecturers and demonstrators are happy to help;
- What you hear about in lectures and practicals isn't everything you need to know, you will have to read around and journal papers are the best source of up-to date information;
- Respect deadlines, don't lose marks for no reason by handing in work late;
- Read your practical schedules before you arrive at the session - you'll get a lot more out of it;
- Experiments don't always work, that's the nature of science - don't get disheartened by it;
- Work experience is a good thing, not only for your CV and bank account, but also to get you thinking about what you want to do next;
- Visit the library, not only could it save you money, by borrowing rather than buying textbooks, but it can be a great place to work;
- Take time out to relax, especially when you're revising for exams; and
- It isn't just about work! Enjoy the opportunities to do new things and meet new people.



## What else might you want to think about?

### Starting out...

- Use freshers week to familiarise yourself with your new university or college and city;
- Nobody knows what to expect when they start, if you aren't sure where something is or what you should be doing, ask!
- If your department or institution has a mentoring scheme make use of it. It can be a real boost to have someone to talk to who knows what it's like to be new, but can answer your questions about which bus to get into the city centre or who to talk to about changing your modules.

### Do you enjoy your subject?

Going to university or college gives you a fantastic opportunity to study something you really enjoy and feel passionate about. But, however much you enjoy your chosen subject, you will need to motivate yourself. It can be hard work and there will be times when you wish you'd never started your course. If you discover what you originally signed up for really isn't for you, changing modules, or even courses, is possible.

### Don't miss out

- Attend all your lectures and make notes, it makes things easier in the long run and if you make the notes (rather than relying on your friends' notes) you're more likely to understand them when revising; and
- Not everything you need to know will be on handouts or PowerPoint slides, and lectures provide information on top of what you can read about in a textbook or paper. You might get exam hints or hear about research in your department and institution.

### Questions

If you don't understand something - ask! Lecturers, demonstrators and tutors are approachable and happy to answer questions or point you towards finding the answer out for yourself. If you don't want to ask in the lecture,

ask the lecturer after, email them, arrange a time to meet and discuss your question, or you could ask your personal tutor, but remember they may be busy - so don't expect an instant answer.

Your fellow students can also be a useful source of information - they might be able to explain a theory differently or point you towards that all important paper.

*"Unlike school teachers, university lecturers neither threaten nor encourage but just expect the work to be done."* Aneeqa Meedin, University of Sheffield.

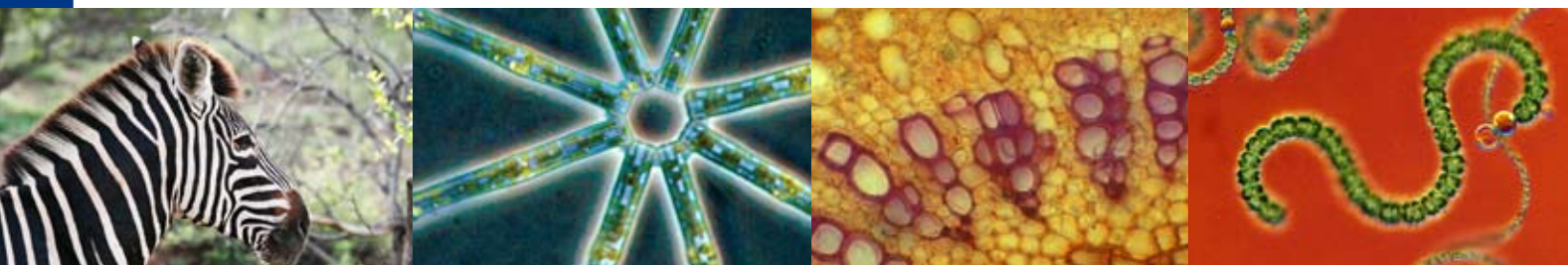
### Visit the library

- Don't just buy all the textbooks on your reading list, use the library, it's very likely there are multiple copies of many of the books on your recommended reading list;
- Go on a library tour so you know how to use the catalogue and find the books and journals you need. You don't always have to go rummaging through the stacks or archives, journals are often available online; and
- Libraries are great places to work, ideal for getting into writing that essay away from other distractions.

### Read around

You will need to read around what you hear about in lectures and practicals, so if you get a reading list, do the reading. Textbooks are useful but for the most up-to-date information journals are best. If you're feeling daunted by a journal paper you could start off by reading the abstract, introduction and conclusions rather than trying to plough through and understand the whole paper in one go. Perhaps your tutor could explain how to get the most out of a paper, section by section?

*"Get used to reading scientific papers in your first year. This is not so much a requirement in the early stages but needs to be second nature by the time of your finals."* Kimberley Washford, University of Bristol.



## Make sure you have enough time

- Respect deadlines! If you have work due make sure you start it in plenty of time, this means more time to research, less worrying, fewer late nights and not losing marks because you handed it in late;
- When you're revising, mind maps can help link together ideas and theories, or you could use coloured pens to break up blocks of text into manageable chunks;
- Keep on top of revision - don't leave it until the last minute and manage your time effectively, as well as being a very useful transferable skill, if you plan your work and stick to that plan you can have more free time; and
- Time out of teaching isn't necessarily "free-time". Just because you don't have a lecture or practical doesn't mean you shouldn't be reading papers or lecture notes, or looking at what you'll be doing in your next practical.

## Practicals and experiments

- Read your practical schedule before you arrive. You'll get more benefit from a practical if you know what you're doing and why;
- Try to develop good skills and techniques when using lab equipment, ask if you aren't sure how to use something and remember - experiments won't always work!
- Practicals can link things together and help your understanding of something taught in a lecture or read about in a paper. Knowing a technique, how it works, what it can be used to do and its limitations can also help you understand papers and research that use that technique.

*"Laboratory sessions are enormous fun and a good way to pick up essential practical skills. In the first year it is important to remember that such sessions are more about gaining experience in performing practical work rather than acquiring perfect results."* Michelle Edwards, University of Manchester.

## Develop your skills

During your course you'll have the opportunity to develop a range of skills, such as presentation skills and team working. Communication skills are also important, you need to be able to communicate with both scientists and non-scientists about your work. Just because you're doing a course in zoology, ecology, genetics (or anything else) doesn't mean it will be the only bioscience subject you study. You may also need to know, or learn, about statistics and aspects of chemistry and physics. You might also be able to take optional modules outside your department, giving you the opportunity to study something different. *"I hope you enjoy university and the study of biology as much as I have"* James Candeland, University of Leicester.

## Where next?

- Think about your future, where might your degree take you? If you do have a career in mind you might want to pick modules or projects accordingly;
- Work experience can show you what the world of work might be like, helps you to develop a wide range of skills, looks really good on your CV and benefits your bank balance; and
- Stand out from the crowd; it's not just your degree that's important, but everything you can offer a potential employer. From the skills you develop during your course to your experiences of running a student society.

## Outside of teaching

It's not all about work. University or college gives you an amazing opportunity to meet a huge variety of people, experience new things and develop life skills. Take time out from your studies, you can't work all the time, and see if there are any societies or sports clubs you want to join - there's something for everyone and you get to meet like-minded people.

*"The best and most well rounded students also ensure they make time for relaxation and enjoyment"* Esther Law, University of Manchester.



Interested in more advice about your course?  
All the tips in this guide came from entries to the Centre's 2007 Essay Competition which asked "What advice would you give to students starting your course?". The winning, runner-up and shortlisted essays are available to download from the Centre website. [www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/funding/essay/essay07.aspx](http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/funding/essay/essay07.aspx)

### What is the Student Award?



An opportunity for you to win up to £250, gain points for your CV and stand out from the crowd. The Award is open to all students registered on a bioscience course at a UK institution and gives you the opportunity to express your opinions and experiences about an aspect of teaching and learning. Find out more at [www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/funding/essay/](http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/funding/essay/)

### Further information and resources

**The UK Centre for Bioscience** student webpages bring together information and resources, including guides on making the most of your course and practical work. [www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/network/students/](http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/network/students/)

**NUS** (National Union of Students) - campaigns, news, advice and discounts for students from the NUS. [www.nus.org.uk/](http://www.nus.org.uk/)

**DirectGov**, information about universities and courses, and articles and pointers about things such as finances and housing. [www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/)

**Guardian student pages**, news and information for students. [www.guardian.co.uk/education/students](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/students)

**Independent student pages**, including sections on student life and career panning. [www.independent.co.uk/student/](http://www.independent.co.uk/student/)

**Student voice**, articles, videos and blogs from students about their time at university. [www.studentstories.co.uk](http://www.studentstories.co.uk)

### Study related

**Skills@Library** from the University of Leeds brings together information on developing your skills, including writing skills, finding and evaluating information and maths skills. [http://skills.library.leeds.ac.uk/student\\_homepage.php](http://skills.library.leeds.ac.uk/student_homepage.php)

The **Student Support and Development Service** at the University of Leicester have an extensive range of resources on academic and research skills you may find useful. [www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ssds/sd](http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ssds/sd)

Need to illustrate your practical reports, presentations or posters? Visit **ImageBank** for thousands of copy-right cleared bioscience images accompanied by descriptions. [www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/imagebank](http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/imagebank)



All the images used in this guide are available from ImageBank.

### Practicals and research

**Virtual Analytical Lab** has descriptions and demonstrations on a number of essential lab techniques such as using a pipette and setting up a serial dilution. <http://hlsweb.dmu.ac.uk/ahs/elearning/RITA/>

**Engage in Research** - a website designed to help you with the key aspects of scientific research, from literature reviews to statistical analysis and scientific writing. [www.engageinresearch.ac.uk](http://www.engageinresearch.ac.uk)

**Bioscience Horizons** - a national journal from Oxford University Press that publishes undergraduate research. <http://biohorizons.oxfordjournals.org/>

### Where next?

Visit **Prospects** for careers advice and guidance and a wide range of careers and job related resources. [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

