

Back on track (Facebook Forum post 31 March 2020)

Even if the last couple of weeks feel like a write-off, you can still get back on track with your study and make this year count.

When all this was kicking off, I put a post on Facebook about the kinds of things we can do to feel more in control when everything seems to be slipping out of control.

Things have only gotten more difficult since then – and as soon as it feels as if we’re starting to get our heads around one set of rules and restrictions, along comes another set that we need to factor in and adjust to .. it’s not easy for any of us.

As well as our general anxiety about the situation, there’s the stress and guilt many of us are experiencing because we don’t feel anywhere near on top of our academic work – quite understandably, it’s seemed way down the priority list.

Some thoughts about how to move on from here:

Keep things in perspective

The last week or two won’t determine your whole year, or your whole degree.



All of us will have bumps in any given year which throw us for a bit, but in time we adjust and move on (we get flu, or have a relationship breakup, or there’s illness in the family) – try to think of the coronavirus disruptions in the same way.

Plus everyone in your course (including your lecturers) will be in the same position as you, trying to adjust to new ways of learning and engaging. Be kind to yourself, and allow yourself time to get to grips with the new ways of doing things.

In short - don’t beat yourself up if the past few weeks haven’t gone to plan. But it’s important now to figure out how to move on from here.

Make a plan

If you have been feeling overwhelmed, or you’ve struggled to keep up with your online lectures etc, the **BEST THING YOU CAN DO** is to set aside an hour or so to figure out what you need to do to catch up.

Identifying the shape and size of the task will immediately make you feel better.

Here are some practical steps to follow:

- Sit down and **write a list** of what lectures you need to watch, what readings you need to do, what problems you need to work on. Write next to each thing how many hours it will take. Now you know what the task is.
- Next, **figure out when you are going to catch up**. Eg: you have 4 lectures to watch, you could make a commitment to yourself to get through 2 of those today and 2 in the morning. Pick up one of the

planners from around College and write in when you will do each task (email me if you're at home and I can send you one electronically).

- **Be realistic** about what you can achieve – eg, by Wednesday lunchtime I'll have watched my lectures; by Thursday evening I'll have done the readings.
- See if you can **team up with a friend** – it may well help to put aside blocks of time to work at the same time as them (whether you're at home or in College you can still work together).
- If it's going to take more than a couple of days of binge-watching lectures to get back on track, then see if you can **prioritise the key tasks**. Your Academic Co-ordinators will be really happy to help with this, and I'm also really happy to help – just shoot me a message.

Of course it'll take some work to get there – but hold on to the thought of what a relief it will be once you're back on track!

Staying on top of things

Once you're up to speed, figure out how to stay on top of things.

Here we're back to the planners again – either the hard copy ones around college, or use something like Outlook.

- Plan out what each week will look like, with blocks put aside both for 'contact time' (lectures, tutes), and your independent work (reading, research, problem sets, etc). Also block in the times you won't be studying, eg you're going for a run, or catching up with a friend.
- Try to keep to as much of a 'normal' timetable as possible – so watch the lectures live, in the usual slots, rather than letting them pile up.
- At the end of each work day look ahead to the plan for the next day, make sure it's manageable, and make any adjustments as needed.

Again, I'm happy to help with setting up your schedule if you'd like, or have a chat with your Academic Co-ordinator or with Kane or Ashlee.

Focus on what you can do, not what you can't

For many of you this was going to be the year when you organized your time properly, stayed on top of your reading, did those extra problem sheets, all with the aim of ensuring that you got the grades you knew you were capable of getting.

Now it might feel as if the opportunity to do that has been taken away. But it hasn't – you can still make this year work for you.

More than that: it can be a hugely positive year for you, in which you learn new ways of thinking and engaging with your subject, and have the opportunity to distinguish yourselves clearly from your peers in terms of how you respond to all the adjustments.

If you want to chat, about this or anything else, let me know!