

STUDY TIPS:

FROM A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE



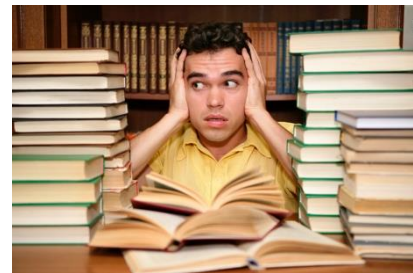
FROM SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY

At school you were primarily a passive learner. Now you are an active student carrying a certain amount of responsibility. While you might still feel similarities to school in teaching situations, i.e. in seminars or tutorials, the whole framework of studying is built upon a certain amount of free choice and self-planning. These choices are both a challenge and an opportunity: they can be disconcerting and frustrating at times (beginning with planning your timetable) but also give you the opportunity to build your very own profile. You only have lectures and seminars for approximately 28 weeks of the year. This leaves you with a great amount of time to decide how to plan your studies.

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ON CREDIT POINTS AND *REGELSTUDIENZEIT*

You should be aware that the number of credit points (a credit point denotes a certain workload decided upon by the ECTS, European Credit Transfer System, which awards one credit point for 25 to 30 hours of work) awarded for a module makes studying in *Regelstudienzeit* a full-time profession. Per semester, you should be averaging about thirty credit points (180 CP = Bachelor), meaning 750-900 hours per semester, i.e. 29-35 hours per week. As you usually have 7-10 classes per week, with on average 14 sessions (98-



‘Studying in *Regelstudienzeit* is a full-time profession.’

140 hours teaching per term), you should be aware that the German state (which is funding every semester of your studies with approximately €8,000-12,000) expects you to spend something between 610 and 800 hours engaged in self-study.

If you want or need to work part-time during your studies, do not expect that you will be able to finish your studies in *Regelstudienzeit*. If you do attempt to, be aware that this can be a stressful and frustrating experience as, although it can potentially be achieved, you cannot always expect to harmonise seminar times and job hours or your lecturers to be understanding towards you prioritising your work aside from studying, as studying is your REAL JOB (i.e. asking a professor to move the date of an oral exam as ‘you have to work that other day’ is not going to get you anywhere).



ON MODULES AND EXAMS

In the *Prüfungsordnungen* of every subject, you will find recommendations on which course/module to take in which semester. Please always, always remember that these are recommendations. While the order in which you take the courses is not arbitrary, and often very useful, the exact semester in which you take the course is technically your choice. To give an example from Sprachpraxis: It is useful to take the courses in the prescribed order, i.e. first SP1, then SP2, SP3, etc., as the content learnt in SP2 (Grammar) will be necessary for your text writing in SP3 (Composition), which will form the basis for SP4, etc. However, please do not feel pressured into taking these courses in your first four semesters. If you end up completing SP4 in your 6th Semester – and not your 4th – THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOU ARE A BAD STUDENT. On the contrary, re-organising exams or coursework according to your very own, personal plan, will probably mean that you are well-organised and have a good sense of what you are able to accomplish in a given time frame. If you do not manage to take six exams in one week, the fault does not lie with bad planning on your part, but on the university's part. (I had seven in two weeks in my second semester, and know now I could have achieved much higher grades had I postponed a few).

Also keep in mind that in most subjects, exams are the primary form of examination only until your second year – I had no *Klausuren* from my fourth semester until the second Master's term. And remember, a 1.3 awarded in your 6th semester is worth exactly as much as a 1.3 awarded in your 4th semester.

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One piece of advice: Especially when you are approaching the end of your degree, you should make sure that a certain course is on offer in the term you then decide to take it: some courses, especially lectures, are only offered every alternate term.

A NOTE ON ATTENDANCE

It is a commonly held misconception that mandatory attendance in lectures and seminars has been discontinued. This is not precisely the case, as your studies in Hannover are part of a *Präsenzstudium*, i.e. the credit points you are awarded for a course encompass a certain number of contact hours, hours you have spent in class. Attendance is mandatory – the only thing that has been discontinued is CHECKING THE ATTENDANCE. This gives you as students a high amount of

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responsibility, as you have been assigned the competence to judge whether it is useful to attend a class or not.



You should use this responsibility wisely: If you choose not to attend a lecture, for instance, there are acceptable and unacceptable reasons. “I was too drunk last night and couldn’t get out of bed” is an understandable, yet unacceptable reason. “The lecturer is unorganized, making it more useful to study at home with the course materials,” is more acceptable – as long as you then actually go on to STUDY WITH THE MATERIALS and don’t spend the time watching *Orange is the New Black*.

Some students believe that attending a seminar that finishes with a written exam is more important than attending one that concludes with an essay/a longer piece of coursework. This is also not true. One could even say that the opposite is the case. A class that finishes with an exam can sometimes be skipped more easily, as, especially in lectures, you can always get the lecture notes from someone else to prepare for the exam. However, in seminars preparing for essays in which you have to decide upon your own topic, being at the seminar makes your work – when you do get down to writing – so much simpler. If you don’t attend and then appear in the lecturer’s office in the penultimate week without a clue what to write about, you probably also can’t expect much assistance from the lecturer.



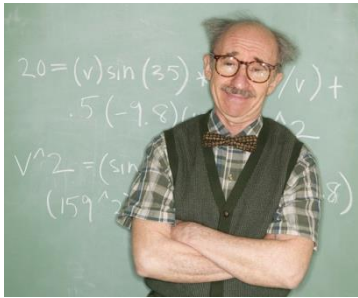
Seminar discussions are a wonderful way to test your ideas, find out what interests you particularly in a certain field, compare what other students thought, and, finally, find something you’d like to write about.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TIME AT UNI

Imagine three people travelling to London as tourists. All three are given a hotel room for five days. The first person stays in their hotel room for all five days, does not go out once, and then returns home. The second person looks at a couple of sights per day and also visits some museums. The third person is very busy and decides to return home after three days, yet somehow manages to visit all of the sights the second person has seen, and even some other ones in the shorter space of time. However, person three had much less time to look at everything, had no time for details, and altogether will probably have profited less from their time there. Although these three people spent their time very differently, all three will be able to say “I was in London for five days last week” upon their return, even the one who didn’t leave the hotel.

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Now transfer this concept to university. After three years of studying, most students will be able to say “I studied English and [second subject] for three years and now hold my bachelor’s degree.” Yet the learning biographies of all those students will be as different as the travel diaries of our three tourists. What you gain from your three to five years here is all up to you.



UNIVERSITY HIERARCHIES

Especially for students from families with no academic background, university hierarchies can be confusing. Here is a quick guide to titles:

‘PROF. DR.’ means this person holds a tenured professorship. They are highest in the university hierarchy and have spent up to thirty years working as scholars in part-time contracts before being awarded this title. They have completed two doctoral theses (a *Promotion* and *Habilitation*) and have had to maintain a considerable scholarly output to gain a post as professor. Using their full title in e-mails and on certificates is, therefore, a token of respect. Please note that professors are often not at the university for the whole week. They have many other obligations besides teaching. Professors sometimes average up to thirty e-mails per day, and sometimes – unfortunately – students’ e-mails don’t have priority. If in doubt, please ask your lecturer how they prefer to be contacted.

‘M.A.’ AND ‘DR.’ usually mean this person is a *Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter*. They have completed their Master’s degree (and, in the latter case, their first doctoral thesis) and are now working on their first or second doctoral thesis. They teach fewer courses than professors and can be very engaged in their writing projects. This may mean that they are going through the same night-shifts of writing as you might be in the term break, so again, please don’t take it personally if they don’t get back to you immediately.

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...AND FROM A LECTURER'S PERSPECTIVE



ENJOY YOURSELF

Enjoy your degree. Set against your future career, it is a short period of time and it will pass quickly. Think of 4 or 5 years compared to 30+ later in one job. Be open to trying new things and see studying as a privilege, not a burden. Maximise what you can get from talking to your peers and lecturers.

LECTURES ARE JUST STEP ONE

Lectures are introductions to a topic. You have not necessarily 'mastered' a topic just because you attended the class. You are expected to go over the material in your own time until you are familiar with it.

ON STUDYING ENGLISH

You cannot swallow a dictionary overnight. Besides, you would most likely end up in hospital, right? If you really wanted to eat one, it would be best to ingest it page by page over a long period of time. This is the key to successful studying. Review your class materials regularly and in bite-sized chunks. This way, it is much more likely to 'stick' in your long-term memory.



CRAMMING DOESN'T WORK

...at least if your goal is to remember knowledge for a future exam or in your career. Cramming may enable you to pass an exam, but the brain cannot store massive amounts of information in its short-term memory. It clears it out after a few days. Students with poor study habits often recall little from the courses they attended.

GIVE YOURSELF TIME TO ADJUST

Know that it is normal not to feel comfortable right away. Give yourself time to become used to the new rhythm of life and the strains, stresses and frustrations of university life. In the end, you'll find that you were glad you suffered through it.

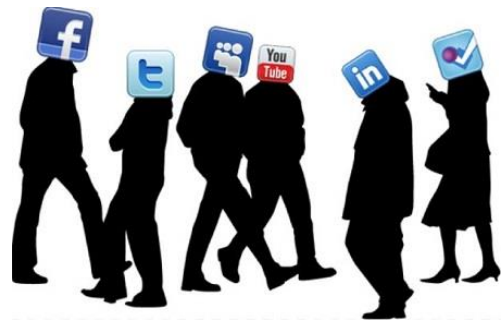


MASTERING A LANGUAGE IS A LIFELONG ENDEAVOUR

You will need to accept that learning a language is a lifelong endeavour. Think of your memory as a bucket, half-full and with small holes at the bottom. If you top it up regularly with studying and immersing yourself in the language, the water will rise. Eventually though, the water will leak out and eventually dry up. So it is with language acquisition. It is our constant task to keep our level high and to top it up even further.

ENGLISH HAS NEVER BEEN MORE ACCESSIBLE

Avail yourself of language-learning resources. Today, in the digital age, they are everywhere. There are apps or websites to access English in terms of film, radio, television, newspapers etc. YouTube and Netflix anyone? There really is no excuse anymore not to immerse yourself in English every day and in your free time. Make it part of your hobbies. If you watch series, watch them in English. If you play computer games, play them in English. Read about current affairs in online English-language newspapers.



GO ABROAD

Go abroad whenever you can and as much as possible. View the three obligatory months abroad as a minimum and aim to spend regular periods in an English-speaking country. This is the best way to improve fluency and vocabulary and to begin really to understand Anglophone cultures. Plus, it looks good to employers and shows that you care about your English a great deal.



ASK. DON'T SUFFER.

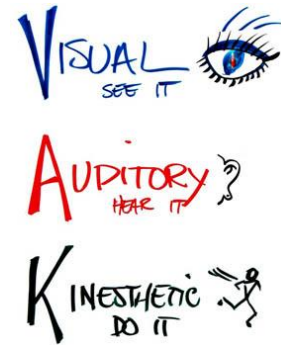
Don't struggle. Talk to lecturers and don't be afraid of going along to office hours (*Sprechstunden*). There is help available at university for everything. If you're suffering, talk to us! We want to help you.

WHEN NOT ABROAD

Use every opportunity you have to speak and write English. This includes to lecturers and each other. You all want to practise your English, so why not start right now by speaking it? Take note of interesting and useful phrases you hear in class or when watching something in English. Describe and explain what you learned in a lesson to someone else. After all, the last stage of mastery is to teach someone else about it.

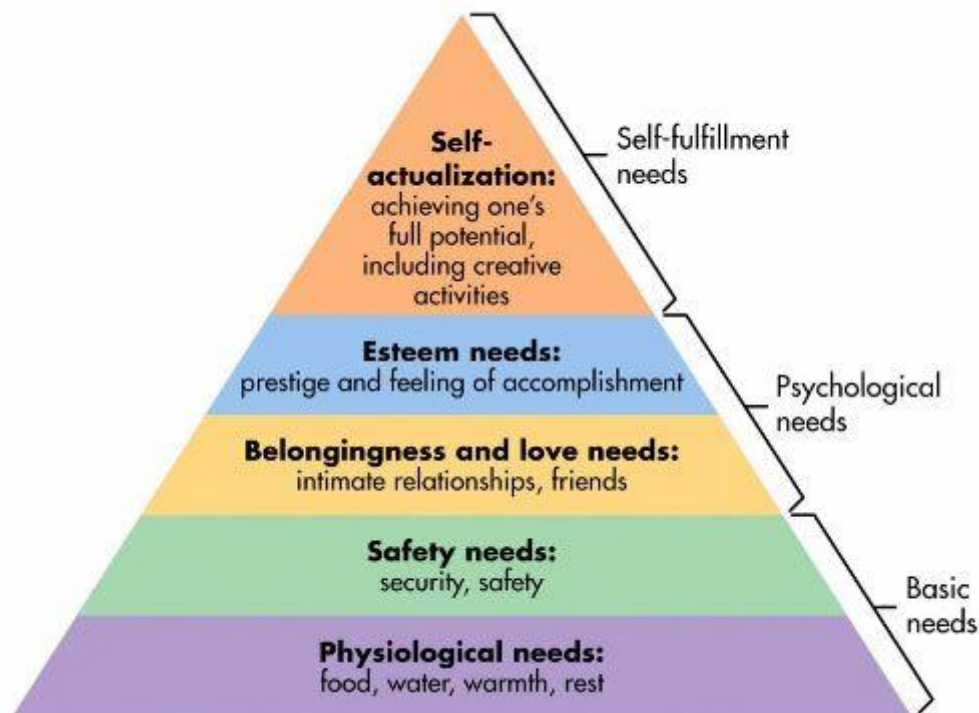
KNOW WHAT TYPE OF LEARNER YOU ARE

Some people are visual learners, some auditory, some analytical, some kinaesthetic, and so on. Figure out who you are and study accordingly. For example, a visual learner may like to make written notes and draw diagrams. An auditory learner might like reading out loud and recording notes to listen to at a later time. A kinaesthetic learner might like to use a more 'hands on' approach, such as making posters or using colours or cue cards.



TAKE CARE OF YOUR BASIC NEEDS FIRST

Nobody can do anything unless they've eaten and slept properly. Try it; you'll find eating a proper breakfast makes all the difference in terms of being alert and awake in class. In addition, just as important as studying is not studying. In other words, do something creative or sporty as a balance to work and study and to let yourself recover. Take a look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Going upwards, each level needs to be taken care of first before the next is possible. Successful studying comes near the top.



REWARD Yourself.



FINALLY, REWARD YOURSELF

One of the most important tips. If you've done well, tell yourself that through whatever means possible. Buy yourself something, eat a treat, go out for the evening, take a day off etc.