

1495



UNIVERSITY OF  
ABERDEEN



# Help from above:

Advice from former  
students on what to  
expect from **Level 3**

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A new academic year is an exciting time, full of new challenges and opportunities. Each year of university is a little bit different – some things get easier, and some things get harder. We know that advancing into a new year group is something people tend to worry about, so we spoke to students at the University of Aberdeen (353 of them!) and asked them what advice they wished they'd received before moving into a new academic year. We hope that this is useful to you and wish you all the best for the new academic year.

# Level

# 3

## What to look forward to



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*Mostly the courses I am now doing are much more where my focus and interest lies, so it is making my overall experience much more positive now.*

– MA (Hons) Linguistics and Philosophy student

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When we asked students what was good about level 3 the most frequent answer was the increased focus on your degree major. Additionally, students described level 1 and 2 as a fun experience that was about exploring and settling into independent life but that they were now happy to feel more established and being able to progress in other ways.

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*I'm certainly more busy than I was last year. This is mostly due to being more engaged in the world of psychology, specifically, having gained official positions within the British Psychological Society. For the first time since attending university I no longer live in student digs but now occupy my own flat which I share with an old-childhood friend of mine. Hobby-wise, I started taking salsa lessons which is great fun!*

– BSc (Hons) Psychology student

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Finally, many students reported that they enjoyed feeling more confident when talking to lecturers due to increased knowledge about their subject and a changing, more mature relationship with staff.

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*I feel more integrated within the School. So I'm able to feel comfortable in approaching lecturers and they take me more seriously than they did in Level 2. It definitely feels more like the stereotypical uni experience where lecturers can tell you do things with short notice and that increases the pressure but equally it's enjoyable.*

– MA (Hons) Linguistics and Philosophy student

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# Reflect on Success

It's important to take the time to recognise just how much you've learned since level 1 and that many of the things you've gotten better at aren't just academic. As you start to think about building your CV and about life after graduation, self-reflection can be a very useful exercise for making sure you do justice to everything you've done so far, as well as for setting future goals.

Self-reflection can be a very useful exercise for setting goals and building confidence. Try using ACHIEVE on MyAberdeen to self-assess, reflect, and improve.



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*I found myself with much less free time than I had in both first and second year. I did not consider this a bad thing however, as I learned how to plan ahead much more efficiently than I had been doing, which actually resulted in me accomplishing more tasks on a day-to-day basis.*

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– BSc (Hons) student

# Academic challenges

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*...stay on top of your notes as this is really helpful when it comes to exams and it also keeps the information a bit fresher in your memory.*

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– BSc (Hons) Biomedical student

## What to be aware of

It is time to build on your successes at level 2. Your fellow students say that at level 3 the work is more demanding and requires greater independence with challenges such as:

- 👁️ **A lack of introductory lectures/ tutorials with exam content and assignments from week 1.**
- 👁️ **The need to keep up with lectures, notes, and reading on a weekly basis.**
- 👁️ **A reduced number of contact hours and more independent research.**
- 👁️ **Higher overall workload.**
- 👁️ **Extra pressure from knowing that level 3 counts towards your final degree classification.**

One of the main pieces of advice was that you should spend roughly 40 hours a week studying and that it's really important to accept that this is not an exaggeration and to do it from the start of the year.

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*The amount of work given in Level 3 is way more intense than Level 2. I don't think it's more demanding skill wise, but it requires a lot of time management to balance everything. There is also much more lecture content than the last two years. There is not as much guidance given comparatively in terms of posts on the Level Facebook group and reminders from staff. Assignments started from the get-go which was shocking but not surprising to me as I have spoken with students from higher levels and PAL leaders that was very helpful.*

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– MA (Hons) Psychology



# Academic challenges

## How to prepare

In preparing for these new challenges, make sure that you take advantage of all the support the university makes available to you.

- 👁️ **Make sure you read your Course Guides and any available assessment guidance.**
- 👁️ **If you're struggling, ask your Personal Tutor or School staff for help!**
- 👁️ **Talk to your peers and students in the levels above you.**
- 👁️ **Find out if your School runs a peer-assisted learning scheme (PAL).**
- 👁️ **Visit the InfoHub (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/support>), the one-stop shop to help you access University information.**
- 👁️ **Visit the Student Learning Service (SLS) <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/sls> which offers:**
  - > Academic skills workshops
  - > 1-to-1 sessions with Academic Skills Advisors
  - > Online resources to help improve your academic writing <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/academicwriting>
- 👁️ **Exam stress services <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/>**

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*Be organised from day 1! Have your books, material etc. ready! A balanced diet works wonders and makes you much more productive! Plan your study time! Take breaks!!*

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– MA (Hons) French and Hispanic Studies student

# Skills and training



## What to be aware of

- ▶ The step-up in difficulty and workload means that you need to make sure your organisational skills and time management are up to the job.
- ▶ You need to have basic IT skills and be able to use programs like Word, PowerPoint, and Excel as well as other software that your degree requires like SPSS or Stata. If you're still struggling with this stuff, you need to do something to address that immediately as it will make everything else harder.

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*Always remember that the longer the studying is left, the more difficult it gets. Missing an hour lecture does not mean an hour catching up, usually it means 1.5h when you do it yourself, if not more. Read ahead, plan, do not fall behind.*

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– Law LLB student

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*Try to read all the course guides and see all the deadlines for the assessments to start working in advance.*

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– MA (Hons) Politics and International Relations student

## How to prepare

- ▶ Help with digital skills can be found in the Toolkit Productivity section (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/productivity>).
- ▶ Try using WorkFlowy to help you break big ideas and tasks into manageable pieces (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/productivity/workflowy>)
- ▶ Make full use of the University's Toolkit <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/> to boost your IT skills. Pay attention to the Digital Skills section of the Toolkit for information on any new software you might need to use at level 3.

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*If you take your workload day-by-day, everything will be fine. If you leave making notes, preparing for essays, etc until the end of term, when most things are due, you will struggle.*

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– BSc (Hons) Neuroscience with Psychology student



# Work-life balance



The increased workload and pressure in level 3 means that it's now even more important to ensure you have a healthy work-life balance and to look after yourself; something that will serve you well when you move into employment where your personal life should be separate from work.

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*The social side of things has changed, in level 1 and 2 going on nights out or just socialising in general was easy as you did not really have to worry about attending all the lectures or missing important information as you knew you could catch up, but level 3 is a game changer and you have to be ahead. So, I would personally say my stress levels have increased but it has also forced me into a sense of a routine with my academic life and social life.*

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– BSc (Hons) Geology and Petroleum Geology student

## How to prepare

Lots of students noted that making time in your schedule for hobbies and activities was important for good well-being. It might sound a bit daunting, but it will make you feel happier if there is a regular activity in your week that you enjoy doing.



## How to prepare (continued...)

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*I personally think time management is key in enjoying and succeeding at university. Make time for the important things like social interactions because that is what ultimately makes you happy, being cooped up in the library all day is the most depressing thing you can do to yourself. Don't be afraid to let go a little bit, and don't feel guilty about enjoying yourself.*

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– BSc Geology and Petroleum Geology student

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*1. Maintain a balanced lifestyle, always plan at least one day off during the week for yourself. 2. Always keep on top of your assignments, work on them from day 1, and aim to be finished a few days before deadline. 3. Never be afraid to ask your lecturer/tutor for more help.*

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– MEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering student

If you are struggling please remember that the University offers a number of other support services:

- 👁️ The Counselling Service offers counselling sessions as well as a range of self-help resources <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/services/counselling/>
- 👁️ The Big White Wall is an online mental health and wellbeing service offering self-help programmes, creative outlets and a community that cares <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/productivity/big-white-wall/>
- 👁️ Headspace is an app that will teach you meditation and mindfulness in just a few minutes a day <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/productivity/headspace/>

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*Take the year in your stride. When you feel like you're drowning just take a deep breath and carry on because you're almost there. Things are going to get really crazy and tough but if you can get through it, then you can get through anything.*

– LLB Law Student

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# Paid work



## What to be aware of

- 👁️ If you need to work for financial reasons, make sure you don't take on more than you can deal with. Between 8 and 16 hours of work a week is manageable, but if you work upwards of 20 hours a week your studies and your physical and mental health will likely start to suffer.

## How to prepare

- 👁️ More advice on finding graduate jobs, internships, and part-time work is available at:
  - > the Careers Services <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/careers/>
  - > Aberdeen University Students' Association <https://www.ausa.org.uk/ausaadvice/employability/workstudy/>

## Final thought...

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*I would advise new level 3 students to embrace the independence and creative freedom you are given in your courses. It is a chance to explore interests within your subjects and makes studying more fun! I would encourage anyone at any level to join societies and sports team because it is never too late to get involved or meet new people! As coursework loads become more intense, really use the opportunity to talk to your lecturers, course coordinators and tutors. Most of them (if not all) are happy to help you and they want you to succeed. Make use of the open office hours and email them about any concerns you have.*

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**MA (Hons) Anthropology - Film student**