GOING TO UNI:
LIFE HACKS
FOR STUDENTS,
BY STUDENTS

OFFICIAL STUDENT LIFE PARTNER

The Student Room

UEA
University of East Anglia
A TOP-15 UNI
(TIMES GOOD UNIVERSITY GUIDE 2017)
Starting uni is an exciting time, but it can also be overwhelming - especially if you’ve never lived alone before. How do you pay a bill? Is reheating rice safe? When should you change the batteries in a smoke alarm?

Sound familiar? If you’re feeling a bit lost about starting your uni life, come and ask TSR a question.

BEFORE YOU GO...

Here are some resources you may find useful:

- What to take to uni: the ultimate checklist
- Our handy guide to Freshers 2017
- The best apps for studying at uni
- Everything you need to know about student bank accounts
- 11 things you must do before Freshers Week
YOUR NEW HOME

If you’re moving away from home for the first time and wishing someone had taught you how this grown-up stuff works, don’t worry! Although it might be daunting at first, very soon you’ll be chilling in your very own digs and feeling chuffed at your newfound freedom. Here are some simple steps to get you started:

1. FIND SOMEWHERE TO LIVE

Not sure where you want to live yet?

If your uni doesn’t offer accommodation or you’d prefer to live off campus, there are lots of different places to look for your own private house or room. You could start by checking out TSR’s Find a Flatmate forum, SpareRoom and your uni’s private sector housing service.

Most people move into halls for first year, and then make a decision about second and third year later on.

By that point, you know what living away from home is like, so you can make an informed decision, and you will have made a group of friends that you will keep for the rest of your degree.

- Origami Bullets

2. FIND YOUR PEOPLE

Housemates – they can be a blessing or a curse! Have an open mind when meeting them for the first time, and be patient while sharing accommodation. Living with people who aren’t your family can be challenging to begin with. When you get on each others’ nerves, try and keep a sense of humour. Having a giggle with your housie about their mountain of washing up is much better than an all-out brawl. It’s always much easier to be open when things are light-hearted. You never know, these guys could become your lifelong friends.

Choosing a good set of housemates for second year is really quite important. Think about things like: Do you have compatible lifestyles, and are they obnoxious? Should you really live with your boyfriend or girlfriend? Are they financially solvent?

- Origami Bullets

There’s typically a big panic around Christmas as people worry where they’ll be living next year, so group up quickly to find a house before ‘all the good ones go’.

But choose your housemates carefully - you only met these people a few months ago, so not everyone’s true colours may have come out. Don’t believe the hysteria - there will be loads of houses left after Christmas!

- katyj_87
This is your new home; you want your room to become your sanctuary. Be creative! Some of the best room decoration is the DIY kind, so budget doesn’t have to decide your style. Don’t forget, you will probably be spending some solid time studying in here, so make sure you’ve got a place where you can get stuck in and focused.

3. GET COMFY

Make your room feel like yours with photos and trinkets. It’ll help you relax.
- tea_loving_girl

Oh and also - if you’re living with housemates, two words: cleaning rota. Just trust us.

Still looking for your uni accommodation?

Here’s some handy guidance to help you understand what it all means. You can also see some helpful tips and questions to ask here.
Almost all students worry about how they will make friends in their new environment.

But try not to panic - everyone’s in the same boat, and you’ll have a new gang of best friends in no time!

The main thing is, don’t worry about it too much.

Making real friends is likely to take longer than a week, especially when it’s kind of a weird week in which everyone’s in a new setting.

Most people will have moved a long way away from the friends and family they’ve known all their lives for many years in order to come to uni, and getting that level of connection with new people will take time.

- Persipan

PERSIPAN’S TIPS:

- Go out and do stuff that enables you to meet people - there will be tons of events and taster sessions so it’s a good chance to try something new

- Don’t worry about whether you’ve made deep personal connections right away - those will develop over time

- If you’re shy or worried about meeting new people, pick events where there’s actually something to do - an animation workshop, or an archery taster session - because then you can meet people in a non-pressured way, since you’re all focusing on the activity.

I started talking to people on the freshers’ Facebook page - from the “where are you from” threads that appear. Everyone started adding everyone - then when freshers’ events would happen you’d start bumping into them

- anonymouspie227

ANONYMOUSPIE227 TIPS:

- Be friendly to your hall-mates (don’t worry, they don’t have to be your best friends)

- Talk to new course-mates - you’ve got one thing in common, after all

- Chat to everyone at taster sessions. I would strongly recommend joining a sports club or society to meet people

- Don’t restrict yourself - start conversations with people and make a bit of an effort. Everyone is in the same boat!

Want to hear more tips from the Community? Come and have a read.
JOINING SOCIETIES

Join as many societies and sports clubs as you like during your first week or two - you can always cut down when you’ve picked your favourites. Go along to all the welcome events you can manage in the first few weeks, as this will help you decide which to stick with. You’ll also get the chance to try a bit of everything and meet people, and your week will be filled with new things that will keep you buzzing about your new uni life.

Here’s just a few reasons to join societies:

- You’ll meet even more people with similar interests as you
- You’ll have a chance to try new things that will fill up your free time productively
- You’ll learn brand new key skills that could help you later in life
- Your CV will be built out and look even more impressive to future employers.

I definitely recommend joining a society – they’re a great way to meet people outside of your course or halls, and you already have a shared interest which you can talk about!

- Deysey

Read more about the benefits to societies here.
LOOKING AFTER YOUR HEALTH

HOW TO EAT WELL ON A BUDGET

Even if you’re a culinary wizard, you’ll likely still find cooking at uni a bit of a challenge, so here’s how to still eat well on a student budget.

Stock up on your basics

There’s nothing worse than arriving home from a long day of lectures to find stale cheese is the only thing in your fridge... To avoid this, stock up on your basic meal staples at the start of every month.

If you’re not short of freezer space, fill it up with frozen veg and meat (or alternatives) when you can, and buy fresh ingredients as you need them so they don’t go off. Don’t forget to freeze any leftovers so you’ve got food when you’re low on funds!

Here’s Interrobang’s cupboard necessities

- Eggs
- Tinned tomatoes or passata
- Pasta, rice or noodles
- Bread (remember this can be frozen!)
- Potatoes
- Baked beans
- Soup
- Herbs, spices and cooking oil of choice
- Stock cubes.
Split the cost (and the cooking)

Splitting the food shop with your housemates means you’ll be able to buy in bulk and save money in the process. It should stop you wasting food too: when you’re shopping for one, it’s easy to overestimate how much fruit and veg you’ll need for the week.

Even if you have different diets, you can stop your cupboards filling up with doubles by sharing basics like ketchup, butter, tea bags and other essentials. If you want to take the idea one step further, why not set up a weekly cooking rota too?

Split the cost (and the cooking)

This is really helpful at making you stick to a budget; you’ll be less likely to make impulse purchases if you’ve got tasty food already planned out for you at home.

If you make big batches of dishes when you cook, you can also use some in pack lunches for uni, or keep a portion in the fridge for when you stumble in at 3am and are tempted to get a kebab...

How to shop smart

- Local markets will likely offer the cheapest fruit and veg
- Make an ingredients list before you go shopping… and stick to it! Take advantage of special offers or 2 for 1s, but only buy it if you can make use of it (you don’t want to be throwing things out the next week!)
- Seek out seasonal produce or reduced items to save some pounds
- Make some simple swaps: chicken thighs are much cheaper than breasts, for example
- Try going meat-free occasionally: Veggie mince is a cheaper substitute for the real thing.

Check out TSR’s recipe book for tons of simple ideas if you need inspiration for some tasty dishes.
Staying fit at uni can seem like a challenge - nights out, an erratic sleep pattern and full days spent studying will most likely leave you feeling lethargic. But getting your heart rate pumping, even for just 30 minutes a day, will have a great impact on your body and your mind.

**Some of the benefits to working out at uni are:**

- It’ll help to eliminate any work-related stress
- You’ll have more energy and motivation
- It can encourage a more positive and happier mindset
- You’ll develop stronger, leaner muscles - a massive confidence boost!

Gym membership offers waved at you during Freshers’ Week can seem tempting, and these are great if you have the money. But you can also introduce some simple cardio or a fitness routine into your life with little to no money.

**Cheap (or free!) ways to keep fit:**

- Running - try the ‘Couch to 5k’ workout here
- Swimming - many pools offer a low, off-peak student rate
- Workout videos - YouTube and Instagram have plenty to offer
- Local fitness classes - usually cheaper than a gym, and no commitment
- Active societies or sport teams - join one you love and it won’t feel like exercise!
- Walk everywhere and take the stairs
- Check out TSR’s Fitness 101 or Fitness Forum for hints and tips.
**HOMESICKNESS**

How you’ll feel when you leave home is totally unpredictable. Exciting times are ahead, with loads of new people to meet and stuff to do... but sometimes it might feel really tough.

You’re not alone though; everyone gets homesick from time to time and there’s lots you can do to be prepared - here are the best bits.

**Have fun with your flatmates**

Little things like grabbing a coffee with your flatmate between lectures can feel comforting when you’re feeling homesick. In the evenings, you could head out to your Union together or check out local bars or pubs. Try anything that gets you together as a group, even if it’s cooking dinner together or starting a new Netflix series.

> Doing things with my flatmates has really helped me, so I spend less time by myself
> - Flauta

**Work the postman hard**

Getting a nice text message or email is one thing, but getting a handwritten letter or a parcel through the post is so much better. It will remind you that people are thinking of you, so make sure your family and friends have your uni address. Get into the routine of sending mail to them, and enjoy all the post you get in return.

> I used to love getting post, my mum used to send me packets of strawberry shoelaces
> - Danny Dorito

**Get a part-time job**

Working a few hours a week gives you something different to do and can be a great way to have fun and meet new people. Working at the SU’s party nights is a great way to get paid to socialise (without the hangover the next day), or try looking on jobs sites like Indeed to see what’s available in your area.

> Check out vacancies in the student union and on campus. Working at uni is an awesome way to socialise and top up your loan
> - She-Ra

Check out more handy tips on how to beat homesickness here.
MENTAL HEALTH

Going to university is a stressful time and this can have a big impact on your emotional and mental wellbeing. But it’s important to remember that a certain amount of worry and anxiety is completely normal – it’s a big transition and everyone feels this way, even if it doesn’t seem like it!

If you find university takes its toll on your mental health, just remember you’re not alone and that there’s always someone to talk to. Many people share their experiences about mental wellbeing at university on TSR every day - check out some advice that members passed on.

My advice to someone going to university would be to talk to someone if you feel you have a mental health issue and it’s impacting you or your ability to study.

Never feel ashamed - it may be scary but it is worth it in the end. Take advantage of the help your university offers and don’t let yourself suffer.

- Pathway

Help is out there if you look and ask for it, and it makes the world of difference to your uni life. My university’s counselling service has been fantastic – they’ve taken on board the level of support I need. I see them once a month to just give them an update and it definitely helps knowing you’ve got others looking out for you.

- Deysey

If you’re worried about suffering with mental health issues at university, have a read about how to look after your mind at uni.

Bullettheory’s tips for keeping well at university:

- If you’re starting to feel the pressure, go and talk to someone at your counselling service or your GP - they are there to help.
- You can always phone the Samaritans or Nightline if you just need to talk to someone.
- Remember that substance abuse, sleep deprivation and avoiding facing up to how you feel is not going to help your mental health. Sometimes a good night’s sleep and avoiding heavy nights out for a bit can do wonders!
Being responsible for managing a budget for the first time can be tough. Even if you’re pretty good with money, living on a student budget can take a bit of getting used to. The good news? Heaps of people have done it before you and still had an amazing time at uni. It’s all in the planning.

1. Assess what you’ve got
Tally up the money from your student loan, any scholarships or bursaries you have, any supplementary money from your parents and the realistic earnings of any part-time work you’ll do. Make a conservative estimate of how much money you’ll have throughout the year.

2. List out what you need
Rent is an obvious one, but there will be lots of other regular payments you’ll have to make. Bills and groceries, sure. But what about prescriptions if you get sick, or printing costs for all your essays? If you plan for all the little things as well as the big stuff, you’ll be much more prepared later on.

You’ll need money set aside for ‘emergencies’ too and at some point you’ll have unexpected expenses like ripping your last pair of jeans or shoes wearing out and you’ll have to buy a few bits and bobs.

- doodle_333

You can check out a basic sample budget from a TSR user to get you started.
3. Be creative!
There's heaps of ways to be thrifty while you're on a pretty tight student budget. Some of our favourite tips?

- **Get an NUS card**
  - leadheadsmith

- **I drew out a certain amount of money each week and that was all I could spend. It also meant I actually had change for the washing**
  - TigerRag

- **Collect any coins you find in a jar - you’ll be surprised how much you get!**
  - Teeside University

- **Consider using coaches for the journey home and back mid-term (difficult at the start and end of term as you might have more luggage). They take longer but are usually much cheaper than the train.**
  - Klix88

4. Keep track
Keeping an eye on what you’re spending will make it easier to make informed choices about where you need to put your money, and when you need to reign it in a bit. This way you’ll also be making more mindful decisions about your spending. Keep yourself accountable!

A lot of TSR users claim a categorised spreadsheet is the easiest way to track their spending while at uni - or a handy app means you can do this on the go.

- **Keep track of the money you’re spending, there are many great apps out there that you can use for this. Keep receipts when you buy things so you can enter them into the budget tracking app.**
  - Zacken

Find some more amazing budgeting advice and TSR’s budget spreadsheet template here.
STUDYING

Welcome to the first year of uni; it’s time to get into your study groove again! You’ve got the basics down after smashing your A-Levels, but how do you manage your burgeoning social life, work, classes and study?

It’s all about figuring out what works for you! Here’s some top tips from TSR users:

1. After you’ve settled in, find a good work-party balance:

   I didn’t take my first year at uni as seriously as I could’ve done; I spent much of my time enjoying the excellent social life, rather than concentrating on the academic side. I was spending 3-4 nights a week enjoying the student life, whilst spending only 1 day per week actually studying outside lectures and tutorials.

   With the help and advice of my uni’s Student Services, I cut down on socialising and spent more time on further reading. When my first semester results came back after the changes I’d made to my lifestyle, my lowest grade was 73% and highest was 86!

   - CharlieK94

2. Read, read, read!

   Read widely, but stay critical of what you are reading. Read the module handbooks thoroughly; I lost count of the questions asked by my coursemates that could be answered from reading the handbooks!

   - Claireestelle
3. Prioritise your workload

Make a list of all the assignments you have for each semester, their weighting and their due dates. Once you’ve got your list, order them in date order - this is the order you need to complete them in.

- Posihannah

4. Make useful notes

If possible, write out the lecture notes before you go into the lecture. My lecture slides were available to see the day before the lecture, so I could make the notes I needed. But don’t just copy the slides word for word - make notes that you understand, can take to the lecture and annotate with important info being said by the lecturer.

- Posihannah

5. Know where to get help if you need it

: If life throws a sudden bad circumstance at you, don’t deal with it alone go see your personal tutor, student support or module leader as soon as you feel up to it. Getting help as soon as possible means things are less likely to derail you from good grades.

- Claireestelle
For more study tips, read through the University Study Tip Thread, check out TSR's free study resources, or make up your own personalised study calendar!

If you’re really struggling to get into the zone, you could also take a look at The Learn Ranger's video on How To Revise - these techniques are scientifically proven to really work...

**AND SOME GENERAL ADVICE…**

If you’re commuting: be as flexible as you can about staying out late, don’t complain about it too much. Remember, there’s nothing wrong with crashing at a friend’s flat for a night once you get to know people.

- Aurora

Don’t assume that everybody is having sex and getting with people. While some are, and will be telling everybody about it, there will be a lot who aren’t and are wondering if they are inadequate.

- MagicNMedicine

Go to as much stuff as possible. Find as much stuff as you like. Choose what you want to do and stick at it. Make friends in as many places as possible. Don’t limit yourself to one clique.

- Aeschylus

Don’t stay up until 5am too often - your sleeping pattern will be ruined!

- ArcadiaHouse

Don’t become something you’re not. It is YOUR time at university and you should make the most of it.

- Aeschylus