

# Working as a student

We asked Student Ambassador Alfie for his thoughts on what it's like working whilst studying.

My first piece of advice for any students looking for a job in term-time would be to make sure you read the job advert closely. If you don't, you may end up like me. Not that that's a bad thing. I'll explain.



When it's all gone a bit hands in the air...

I'd been at Edinburgh for almost a year, and was coming up to the start of my second year. The shock of being at university had finally worn off, and I began to realise that my degree left me with some spare time in the week. Now, spare time is a great way to unwind, but for some of us, too much spare time leaves us feeling aimless, and that's certainly the way it is with me. So, I took myself onto the University's MyCareerHub and began to hunt for some part-time work because, hey, everyone needs a hobby, and it hardly hurts if that hobby is paid. There I was, flicking through all kinds of different opportunities – Typist? Too uncoordinated. Childcare? Not quite my speed – when I noticed that the Student's Association

were looking for... Security? Sure, that doesn't sound too hard, and the pay seemed good. Bouncer. Stand on the door and scowl. Right?

Eighteen months later, I'm still working that same job. Except it's not the job I expected. But that's OK, because it's a world away from being a bouncer. The advert emphasised customer service and communication, which, while useful for the job is not the purpose. I now know that the role focuses a lot on managing the expectations of customers and doing your best to make sure everyone is looked after and safe. It's given me a real sense of freedom and skills I know I'll use elsewhere. Finding employment and managing the schedule it brings alongside full-time study is an impressive achievement – one that future employers will look for, and one that demonstrates a great step into maturity. What's more, you can get official recognition for it on your HEAR transcript with an Edinburgh Award.

I have a new income stream alongside my studying, and more focus as I spend less time staring aimlessly at the ceiling. I also have a new group of friends from all kinds of backgrounds, as well as experiences and ambitions that I'd never considered before moving to university, to share an entirely new part of my life.

Some people are fortunate enough to never need to work whilst studying, but for the many of us that have to, Edinburgh is full of opportunities whether it's a Saturday job, something a little more regular, or one of the many full-time positions over the summer. There really is something for everyone, and something to ensure that we can all get a little more money in our pocket.

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# Being a Student Ambassador

One of our Student Ambassadors, Kate, tells us why she was interested in the role.

New beginnings are some of the most exciting experiences of our lives. For me, the most exciting new beginning was when I uprooted myself from Lancashire in the North West of England and came to Edinburgh alone to begin my university experience. Now, in my fourth year, I am just as excited whenever I return to Edinburgh as I was back then.

When the opportunity arose to become a Student Ambassador, I put myself forward immediately because I knew I wanted to be a part of these new beginnings for other people. Getting to be a part of the excitement of open days and talking to prospective students about Classics has been a way that I can show my appreciation for the School, and my enthusiasm for my subject.

Whilst I have been an Ambassador, I've been presented with many opportunities to get involved with the School. Not just through Open Days, but also through focus groups for bettering employment in SHCA, calling campaigns to prospective students and giving individual tours of the building. All of these things revolved around my own schedule, which means that they never affected my studies.



The Chancellor, HRH The Princess Royal, Princess

Anne unveils a plaque marking 300 years of history being taught at the University of Edinburgh

I think my favourite experience as a Student Ambassador was attending the celebrations for the 300<sup>th</sup> year of History at Edinburgh. There was the chance to hear some amazing talks by current students and alumni, to engage with many other alumni of the School and I got to meet the Chancellor, HRH The Princess Royal, Princess Anne. It was amazing and something I will never forget.

All of the things I have done with great friends, who I wouldn't have met otherwise because we're on different courses. This has been one of the best things about being an ambassador.

Anyone who wants to be involved in the School should become a Student Ambassador because you aren't just helping the School out; you're also creating memories and opportunities for yourself.

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## Top tips for exams

One of our students, Sarah, gives us the lowdown on surviving exams.

As a student, exams are inevitable: some courses only require in-term coursework, but most have a final exam to test your learning through the semester. As a fourth year I've gone through many exams and have developed my ideal system for dealing with them. This is my list of top tips for exams,

based on what has helped me through these four years.

## **Revision**

There is no denying that revision is stressful, especially when exams are early or come closely together. What comes first is figuring out where you can revise best. I personally like to find a good café where there is some background noise and lots of coffee and snacks, however, others might prefer the library, various other university buildings, revising in accommodation, or revising from home. Even if you prefer to move around to revise, I'd recommend finding some reliable spaces where you can work well and sticking with them.

Once you've found your revision space, the work itself is the next step. Over the years, most of my courses have been composed of a number of different and distinct topics, with exam questions relating to these individual topics. It's usually best to revise a few of these topics rather than the entire course, to build greater depth of knowledge in particular areas. Always make sure to ask your lecturer for advice on how to best revise, and how many topics you should learn for the exam.

## **Relaxation**

Revision is important, but you should also allow time to relax and wind down. I have a bad habit of overworking and getting very stressed, particularly with essays and exams, and have had to force myself to stop working after I've done a certain amount or if it's getting too late in the evening. In exam time you have to take care of yourself – eat well, don't overdo the coffee, make sure to get enough sleep (I've found apps like Sleep Stories and Slumber are good for distracting me from overthinking), and try not to overdo it. Make time to talk to your friends and flatmates, as they'll all be feeling the stress too. It's important to get work done, but it's just as important to keep yourself feeling OK, relieve some stress, and remember, especially, to take a break after an exam if you

have another soon after. It's good to do well but not if you're sacrificing your physical or mental health to do so.

## **In the exam**

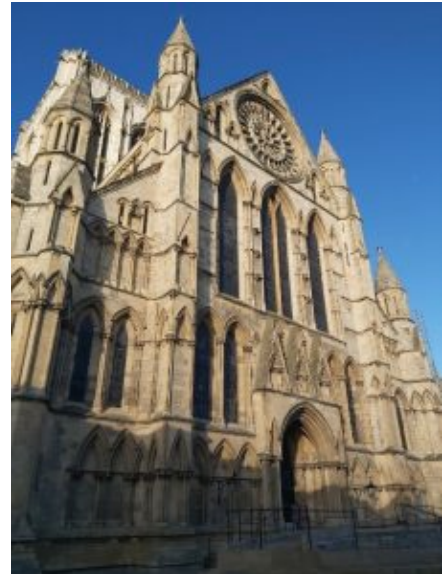
The next step is the exam itself. Always remember to take plenty of pens, a highlighter can be useful, and definitely remember a watch in case your seat doesn't have a clock nearby. Take your time and read the questions carefully (everyone tells you to do this but it's definitely important!), and try to decide on both essay questions early so when you go back to the second your brain has had a chance to come up with an answer. Before writing, it is always useful to sketch out a plan – even just a basic structure for the answer – that you can go back to when you are writing, to help yourself out later. With two hours for two essays, I take five minutes for each essay to plan its structure, then around ten minutes per paragraph, and any spare time to reread my answers. This may not work for some, but it has done well for me so far!

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## **Presenting a paper**

Student Ambassador reports back from presenting her paper.

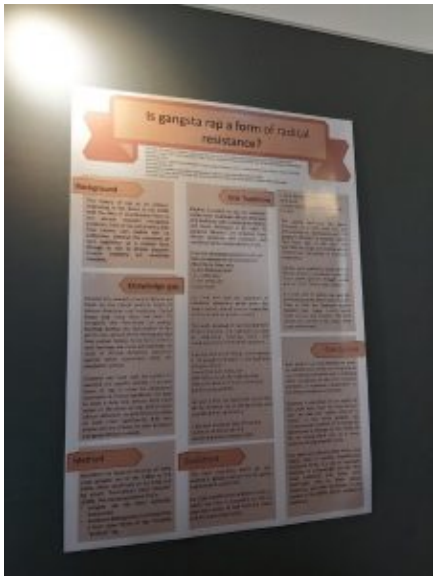
In late February 2020, I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to present a paper at 'From Margins to Centre? An Undergraduate Conference on BAME, LGBTQ+, Women's and Disability History' at The University of York. I had never attended a conference before and had no idea how to write and present a paper, so this was a really valuable experience for me to learn a lot of new skills!



York Minster.

I decided to travel to York the day before and stay overnight in a hostel so I could see the city, as I heard that it's very beautiful. The rumours were certainly true! I had a fabulous time at the York Castle Museum, which seemed to go on forever (perfect for a museum enthusiast like me) with exhibitions on the history of the body, life in the trenches during the First World War, and Britain in the 1960s, to name a few. I particularly enjoyed the body exhibition because it reminded me of a course called 'The Making of the Modern Body' which I studied in my second year, and I found the fashion history exhibit very interesting because it showed how ideals of beauty have changed over time.

I arrived at the University of York campus early in the morning to listen to the many panel discussions taking place, which included papers from undergraduate students from all over the UK. Some of the topics presented included the role of West Africans in the French Resistance during the Second World War, attitudes towards the disabled poor in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Norwich and the problems with the terminology 'Islamic Art' within the field of History of Art.



Lola Moutel-Davesne's poster on 'Is gansta rap a form of radical resistance?'

The talent of the panellists and the breadth of interesting topics that were presented were amazing, many of which I had never explored in my own research! During the lunch break, many undergraduate students also presented posters on their research, including another of Edinburgh's history students, Lola Moutel-Davesne, who presented a poster on her dissertation research relating to gangsta rap and black activism in the US.





The all-important speaker's name badge.

At the end of the day, it was time for me to present my paper. My panel discussion was all about how history can inform us about the identities of marginalised groups, and my talk in particular was about the history of bioengineering (the industry which designs and constructs artificial limbs) and the experiences of those who used artificial limbs in Edinburgh since the First World War. I had learned about bioengineering history through my summer internship at the Lothian Health Services Archive which is part of the University of Edinburgh's Centre for Research Collections. This role had made me realise my passion for disability history and why I am now studying the history of HIV and AIDS in Scotland as part of my undergraduate dissertation.

I'd be lying if I said that presenting my paper was not a terrifying experience, but I am so proud of myself for doing it and hopefully raising awareness for further research into the field of disability history. Here's hoping I can be involved in other conferences in the near future!

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## Summer in the city

The rules and regs of summer in Edinburgh by Student Ambassador Ruby.

I've always argued that Edinburgh is a city designed for 'bad' weather. The Old Town looks even more Gothic in the gloom, and no student's Instagram would be complete without a photo of Arthur's Seat surrounded by atmospheric sea mist called 'haar'. However, I'm also an advocate for staying in

Edinburgh over the summer months so I've always chosen to take a summer job here, rather than head back to my family home, once exams are finished.

Over the past 3 years I think I've made every summer mistake possible, from getting sunburnt on the Meadows to promising myself I'll still revise if I go and sit outside. Some of these mistakes could be avoided with a bit more common sense, admittedly, but others you can only learn to avoid through trial and error. To give you a head start, I've decided to compile some of my hard-earned wisdom into some dos and don'ts. Enjoy!



The Meadows in bloom.

## **DO make the most of every sunny day**

Summer in Edinburgh seems to always begin just as you're having to revise for exams or work to a deadline. "That's okay", you tell yourself, gazing wistfully out of the library window, "I'll work hard today and then I'll enjoy the sun at the weekend." Sensible, right? WRONG. What you'll quickly

realise during your first summer in Edinburgh is that sunny days are glorious, but fleeting. The second the sun comes out you need to make the most of it, as it won't be there long!

## **DON'T burn the grass on the Meadows!**

The Meadows is a large public park, located behind the University's Main Library. During the summer months it becomes the city's shared back garden and the epicentre of most students' social lives. Trying (and failing) to grill sausages over a disposable barbeque is a Meadows rite of passage and on a sunny day you'll see plenty of others doing the same. However, just as essential to this ritual as ketchup or hotdog buns are bricks to prop up your barbeque. Edinburgh residents are very fond of the Meadows and, therefore, very protective of it. A single blade of singed grass is enough to get you dirty looks ...

## **DO head outside of town**



Sun, sea and sand at Dunbar.

By the time it gets to your first summer, you'll be feeling

settled in Edinburgh. You'll have your preferred floor of the Main Library, a favourite coffee shop, and a fierce loyalty to a particular late-night chip shop. You'll be feeling more confident and at home, and exploration will probably have taken a back seat in favour of studying.

However, summer is the perfect time to recapture that spirit of adventure you had in Welcome Week! With no more deadlines to hold you back, consider heading outside of the city centre. Portobello Beach is just a bus ride away and has a wonderfully retro amusement arcade to enjoy if the weather starts to turn. Alternatively, Dunbar has stunning views and is easy to reach on the train.

### **DON'T try to get anywhere in a rush ...**

It is often said that the city's population doubles in August thanks to tourism. Whether this is true or not, it certainly *feels* true as previously quiet streets become bustling. Not only is there more people, the crowds also move slowly. Whilst you've had weeks to admire Edinburgh, everyone else wants to stop and take photos every few steps. Unfortunately, I've never found a way to get around this problem – you just have to relax and add an extra half hour onto every journey time.

### **MAYBE get involved in the Fringe?**

I finish on a controversial one here – the Fringe seems to divide opinions. If you haven't heard of it, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe is an arts festival which lasts for almost the entirety of August. There are thousands of shows and practically every spare room in Edinburgh becomes a temporary performance space. Fringe-haters complain about the crowds and the cost of a pint of beer being hiked, whilst Fringe-lovers can be found rushing from show to show and taking every flyer they are offered on the street.

I fall somewhere between the two. Yes, the Fringe is expensive but it's very easy for students to find part-time work. And,

whilst the hours can be long and unsociable, working the Fringe is a great way to meet new people. The city does become very busy, but there's also the chance you'll spot a celebrity. Give it a go – it's right on your doorstep – then make up your own mind.

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## **What I wish I'd known before starting university**

Student Ambassador Scarlett looks back at the things she wished she'd know before starting her studies.

With 2 years of university completed, I've had a bit of time to reflect on my experience so far. As a History and Politics student I've gained several writing, studying, and analytical skills, but there is so much more to coming to university than just lectures and learning.

### **Take advantage of the City you're in**



You're at university to study, of course, but you just moved to a new city as well! Edinburgh as a city has so much to offer outside of George Square and the immediate Old Town that

surrounds it. It's so easy to get caught up travelling around the Nicolson Street area but you do not want to miss seeing the Castle, Holyrood Palace, Botanic Gardens and more. The rest of Scotland is easily accessible and it can be really helpful, some days, to travel out of the city and see the beautiful views available. You don't want to go all four years not taking advantage of what an amazing city Edinburgh is.

## **Don't beat yourself up if it's not amazing all the time**

University is some of the best times of your life! But don't worry if it's not like that all the time. It can be easy to feel lonely and hard to be away from your parents sometimes, it also can be really difficult to go from school into university. You're making the transition from just focusing on your academic and personal life to having to constantly juggle academics, cooking, personal life, health, etc. all at once. It's exciting in the beginning but as the term progresses and you get more of a workload it can be difficult to balance. It's a big change so don't worry if you find it difficult. Also, don't worry if your friends you find in freshers' week aren't the same later on. Everyone is still trying to find their group of people and you won't always end your year with the same people you started with. Take everything at your own pace!

## **Take care of your physical and mental health**

Your health is super important so make sure that you take care of yourself! One of the hardest parts in the first year of university is adjusting to living by yourself. You don't have someone there to remind you to eat properly or take a break. Try to keep on top of things and learn how to deal with stress and time management. In my first year I struggled to balance cooking, gym, classes, personal life, breaks, and seeing family. Now I've realised it helps me to make a list of goals at the beginning of each week and think on it. It's helped me

keep my balance and work ethic sustained! And if you need any help, it's okay to ask for it.

## **It's okay to have alone time**

In my first year I felt like I always had to be around people and always had to have plans on the weekends. It is important to take a breather, though! There's nothing wrong with having a night in to recharge. It's okay to say no to going out sometimes and just spend time with yourself. You have four years here and those club nights, parties and plans aren't going anywhere! Take everything one step at a time. Not everything needs to be done in the first semester of the first year.

## **First year does count**

Yes, there is the safety net that first year technically does not count towards your degree, but because of this there are always some students who may not show up to every class. However, first year is incredibly important in giving you the tools you need to get you through second, third, and fourth year. Get into the habit of doing regular work, making relationships with your tutors and spending time studying. Just because it doesn't count doesn't mean it's not important! Trust me on this one.

## **The library is your BFF**

Going along with number 5, take first year seriously and learn how to utilise the library and use the time there wisely. Edinburgh has an amazing library with every single book on the reading list. Some classes even make use of the research collections on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor.

Learn how to use the systems and online journals and save



yourself a lot of time. I promise this will come in handy! Nothing like a fourth-floor library session to crack out the final bits of your essay.

## **Join societies and make connections**



You have nothing to lose, so join as many societies that interest you! This is the perfect time to try something new. On the activity side Edinburgh has cheer-leading, horse riding, and dancing as well as academic ones like Model UN, History Society, Classics Society and so many more. Edinburgh has an abundance of societies and you're bound to find one you like! Even if you're nervous and you've never done it before, I promise there are a thousand other new students in exactly the same position. Try new things and take some risks! I've met some of my closest friends through joining these societies and have just got back from a fun trip to Prague with the History Society. It's a great way to get involved and create a community in your School and you never know what fun experiences you'll get! Also, making sure to network and take advantage of the cool events the School and these societies offer. When opportunities come to meet professionals or graduate scheme recruiters, take advantage of them. You never know when it can come in handy!

## **You don't have to do what everyone else is doing**

Take everything at your own pace. Everyone learns differently, everyone has different preferences, etc. Don't let the student stereotype of stress culture pressure you into acting a certain way.



## **Don't over pack**

Your room in your halls does not have the capacity for your entire wardrobe. You can leave a couple shoes or random bits and pieces behind. The top you haven't worn in 5 years can stay behind. Please learn from my mistake.

## **Enjoy every moment**

Everyone is in the same boat, navigating this roller coaster of a time. There's so many opportunities to take advantage of, new friends, and new experiences to enjoy! Just relax and don't overthink things. You'll be great.

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# **Essay writing**

Everything you ever wanted to know about essays but were afraid to ask by Student Ambassador Constance.

Essay writing, love it or hate it, it is the metric by which we students are measured. Figuring out your 'style' is something of a journey and will inevitably include some painful marks to grow as a writer. However, there are some tips I can offer, distilled from my four years of successes and failures, to help demystify the approach to essay writing.

Picking a topic – Don't go for the obvious and easy. This can be hard, especially if you are pressed for time. But the reality is a lot of people are going to go for the obvious and easy, especially if you are in a big course. It will only make it harder for you to stand out amidst the fifty other people who picked the same question.

Picking a topic Part 2 – Pick a topic you like. If you like a subject more, chances are you are going to try harder and,

dare I say, enjoy the process of researching more. Better yet, if you have the opportunity to pick a question, go for it. It is a perfect opportunity to focus on what *you* enjoy.

Research – Get your ducks in a row. Do not cut corners, I repeat, do not cut corners. This is when you want to be organized and systematic. Make sure you are clear when you take notes and have noted who said what. I still get cold sweats thinking about running to the library at 3 am because I could not figure out which book I had taken a quote from.

Research – Be one with the source. If you are using primary sources, it is best to have a direct quotation so that you ensure you have not lost any of the original source's meaning, especially if it is literary in nature.

Writing – (When you can) Take bite size pieces. Inevitably, there will be a time where you write an essay in a day. Afterwards, you will feel groggy, gross and your brain's IQ will have depreciated to the value of a guinea pig until you have had a full 8 hours of rest. Some people can function perfectly under these circumstances – if you are one of them, Godspeed my friend – but most are not. My best essays were slow burners where I took time to make a really pretty and detailed outline and only wrote a maximum of 500-1000 words per day.

Editing – Take some time and then go for it. Essays are like boyfriends or girlfriends; sometimes you just need a little space. Give yourself a day or two to avoid your essay and then go to a printer, print that baby out, grab a pen and read it aloud. Yep, read it like it is the Queen's Speech and cringe at the sound of your own voice. It the most useful tip a lecturer from first year gave me, and by far the most surefire way to catch grammar mistakes.

Submit – Get the receipts. Chances are you will be submitting your essay online via Turnitin. For all that is good and holy,

no matter how tired you may be, check your email to make sure you got a receipt confirming your submission. Nothing is worse than losing marks for an essay you thought you submitted on time.

What is perhaps the most important thing is not to be dismayed if you do not get the mark you want. Read the feedback and take it to heart when you go to write the next one.

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## Working as a student



Jack hard at work.

All work and no play? Student Ambassador Jack looks at working as a student

At times, it can be a tricky balancing act but I've benefited greatly from getting a glimpse into the world of work; from stepping into a completely different environment to University study, doing something I enjoy whilst gaining different skills from those I might develop at University.

I think I am in an incredibly fortunate position. I'm able to study full-time at a thriving, diverse university, with all the extracurricular and social opportunities that offers, but also work at one of Edinburgh's busiest tourist attractions.

I work at the Royal Yacht Britannia as a Sales Assistant overseeing ticket sales and working in the gift shop. Every week during term I'm able to work just one day and then work practically full-time over summer, so from that point of view I've been very lucky to have a supportive and flexible employer who has been able to offer me this contract.

It's fantastic to work with the public alongside a highly engaged customer service team, and it's also widened my social group outwith University. I love representing my city – of which I am extraordinarily proud – by working in the tourist industry.

To any student who is thinking about what it is like working and studying, I would say it is certainly testing. There have been weeks when I have found it tough, juggling deadlines and shifts – University is hard enough and any job is a big commitment. But I think it's challenged me to be more prepared and organised, not least when it comes to good time management – a vital skill in any workplace – and I've become a more rounded and experienced individual for it. I would very much encourage you to consider whether a wee job on the side could be beneficial to you – if nothing else, it's some extra cash for us poor students!