

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 6th 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.