

How can I prepare for the next level?

As you move into the next year of study you will find that expectations become higher in a range of areas and skills, including self-management and discipline. This guide will provide an overview of the key topics you can focus on to step up to the next level. More in-depth guides to some of these skills are also available.

Time management

More demands on your time will require you to plan further ahead. Expect your workload to increase – this includes your taught sessions, but also your independent learning. This will take the form of planning ahead of formal sessions, reading more widely around your subject and engaging more deeply with the key areas; all of which take time. You may need to think about your existing commitments and whether you can maintain them.

Justify

Increasingly you will be expected to justify everything you include and argue in your work. It is vital to weigh up different sources against each other for inclusion, as well as different perspectives and arguments. Prioritising what to incorporate into your assignment word limit is a key skill which becomes more and more important and will carry marks.

Wider reading

As you move to a higher level of study you will need to demonstrate an increasing level of awareness. You are no longer a novice in your field, so build upon your existing knowledge and identify different arguments. Make it clear from your reference list that you have used a range of sources (i.e. books, journal articles, primary reports, etc from different authors) considering a range of perspectives. The more you read, the more you will appreciate how well or badly some authors argue which will help to prioritise sources. It is important to focus on the higher quality sources which have been written by the respected authorities in the field. Please contact your Academic Librarian for more information on extending your literature searching. Have a look at these guides on reading to help develop your reading skills.

More perspectives and questioning

A well-informed assignment demonstrates an appreciation of multiple perspectives which can present diverse arguments; for example, client, employer, government, professional body etc. By bringing together different arguments you will find yourself in a position to start questioning them. It is important to consider any impact and significance of the key groups concerned with your topic. Prioritise the quality information from a range of sources and think about the following questions as you read:

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- Do they agree with your thoughts on the subject?
- Do they agree with what else you have read?
- Do they convince you of their argument?

Find relationships

Start thinking more broadly than your module. Can you identify how topics covered in other modules or other subjects may influence or view the topic you are discussing? Look for relationships between different elements and see if they shed any light on the area. These could include arguments, similar behaviours or the way things interact with each other. Perhaps they enhance or disprove an argument or offer an alternative approach. Equally, think about the key ideas and processes within your subject and identify any possible significant links.

Less room for error

Remember your tutors are experts in your field, so be clear what points you are making and demonstrate your understanding through accurate use of terminology and interpretation of evidence. Marking criteria becomes stricter, and much of this relates to moving from description to analysis. Punctuation, grammar, presentation and referencing style become ever more important the higher you go through the academic levels.

Digital literacy

In addition to your subject knowledge you also have the opportunity (and expectation) to learn about online tools and media. What specific resources are you aware of for your course, such as image/video editing, statistical analysis, programming, software or media programmes? Improving your abilities with these tools, plus being aware of the range of brands in the area will help you to progress in your field.

Developing your own expertise

As you read more widely and acquire more knowledge in your field, you will increase your own expertise. You will also realise that there are certain areas, potentially related to your plans for future employment or study, which interest and motivate you more than others. Focusing your independent study and additional reading on these areas will help you to develop more specialised and deeper knowledge of certain topics. You are still expected to be familiar with all materials covered in the course, but when you have a choice of readings, essay topics, or other assignments, consider which areas you would like to be an expert in for the future.

Next steps

Look at any material for your next level, such as assignment briefs, reading lists, topic areas etc. Identify the key vocabulary and principles and make sure you understand

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the tasks you will be asked to do. Identify what resources are available through the [Skills Hub](#), and the [Research Hub](#).

The marking criteria for the University of Northampton is governed by the [University Modular Framework \(UMF\)](#). This is an overview of the areas the piece covers, but please see the full document for more details:

Level 4: Adapt learning strategies to overcome difficulties and produce the quality of work required.

Levels 5 and 6: Seek out, reflect on and respond to feedback from a variety of sources.

Level 7: Be an independent and self-critical learner, guiding the learning of others and managing own requirements for continuing professional development.