What’s in CamGuides for Undergraduates

Using CamGuides for Undergraduates

Thank you for looking at CamGuides for Undergraduates. We hope that you will find it useful at this exciting time, as you make the transition to university.

It is a resource for students about to start an undergraduate degree at the University of Cambridge. It doesn't matter which subject you will be studying or which college you will join. It aims to introduce you to some of the academic and information skills that you will need during your studies, as well as how and where you be working.

We hope that it will give you useful information on what it is like to be an undergraduate in Cambridge and help you to feel more confident about making a start on your academic work at the University.

How will I learn at Cambridge?

At university you will learn and be taught in a variety of engaging ways by a host of experts. Some of these methods of teaching may be new to you or be structured differently to the way you learned at school or college. You’ll learn in large lectures and small supervisions, in groups and on your own. You may be able to choose what you study, or there may be compulsory elements. But everyone will have the chance to interact with academic staff in a range of settings, which are designed to develop different skills and support your studies.

This guide is divided by different methods of teaching and learning. Click on each title on the left-hand side to learn more about what these terms mean in the Cambridge context.

Where will I learn in Cambridge?

We are delighted that you have chosen to study in Cambridge and are keen that you feel at home in this city. You will get to know it very well over the course of your first year but be prepared for it to take time to orientate yourself.

We encourage you to look at the map to get a feel for where your college is in relation to your department, browse timetables for your subject area to see where you might be studying, and read about Cambridge libraries to familiarise yourself with the range of learning resources on offer throughout the city.
What skills will I develop as an undergraduate?

University may feel like a completely new way of learning, very different to how you were taught at school or college. This requires a new and varied skill set. Your department and college know that you are unlikely to arrive with these skills fully developed, and it may take years before they come naturally. However, if you invest time and effort in developing effective ways of working at the start of your degree, they can provide a strong foundation to build on as the demands of your course increase.

This section will introduce you to some of the generic skills that you will develop during your time at Cambridge. There will, of course, be lots of subject-specific skills which you'll also need, requiring different approaches. For some students there will be very little contact time, while others may find themselves engaged in departments all day, as well as for part of the weekend. As you look through this section it may be helpful to be aware of areas that are new to you and to think about how you might develop those skills. But don't worry: your tutor, Director of Studies, supervisors and librarians are here to help you when you arrive in Cambridge. We hope that knowing about these skills before you start university will help you feel more positive about your work, which in turn will make it more enjoyable and may even impact on its quality.

How do I find books and articles from a reading list?

Reading lists are beacons to guide you through the vast array of research in your subject area. They are recommendations of books, journal articles and other resources made by your lecturer, supervisor or Director of Studies. Sometimes they are comprehensive, other times very specific. Not all degree programmes use reading lists throughout the duration of the course. However, it is likely that academic staff will recommend readings to you at some point.

In most cases you are not expected to buy items listed on reading lists. Increasing numbers of books and articles are available to you online and the huge number of libraries in Cambridge mean you should be able to get access to physical copies (where they exist) without too much trouble. If you really need your own copy, your department will let you know.

This section will focus on explaining the sorts of resources that may be on a reading list and how you can recognise them from the reference. We then discuss how you find them, both physically and online.
How do I reference and avoid plagiarism?

Academic work, at all levels, draws on texts, ideas, images, sounds, designs, research, or coding produced by others. Not all students will be referencing these from the start of their degree. But when you do come to, you must give full credit following the conventions for your discipline. If you don’t cite an idea or direct quotation, you could be accused of plagiarism: the intentional or unintentional passing off of another’s work as your own.

Equally, there is no point searching for these resources, reading, and making notes if you can’t easily find a quotation or page reference when you are writing an essay or report. Making clear and traceable notes as you go along is by far the most efficient way to work.

Referencing in most subjects takes the form of a citation at a relevant point in the text and at the end of the piece of work. The format or style used for citing resources (e.g. Harvard, MHRA, MLA etc.) varies between subjects. This guide introduces the overall principles, but be sure to find out how your department prefers you to cite and reference by checking departmental handbooks, asking your supervisor and looking at the Reference Management LibGuide.