

GUIDE FOR MATURE STUDENTS



Getting the most from
Teaching and Learning at
DMU

Introduction

Mature Students are aged 21 or over when they start their degree and can be up until their 90s.

All mature students are returning to study after a significant break from full-time education, often after many years of working or having other responsibilities. This can feel both exciting and daunting.










Overall, mature students do well when they study at University. You will too, although there may be some ups and downs along the way. We hope this Guide, created by DSU and DMU, helps you. Firstly, let's think about the Student journey, and how different stages might feel for you.

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**Nationally 40% of
mature students
are over 30**

KEY POINTS IN THE STUDENT JOURNEY	Just before course starts	Meeting other young and older students	1st Lecture	Learning new things	1st Seminar	Learning new things	Writing 1st Assignment	Learning new things	Getting Feedback from lecturer
Feeling great or excited									
Feeling Anxious or Worried									
Add Extra Comments here	Excited and a bit nervous			This is so exciting and stimulating. Brilliant!			Apprehensive but preparing well will help		Worried BUT hopeful....I will learn from feedback

QUESTION – what other ‘key points’ would you add to the teaching journey at DMU? How would you rate your feelings?

Introduction, continued

Preparation for study at University can really make a difference. Taking advantage of the free support offered by DMU is highly valued by mature students, and can really help eg workshops on study skills, using the library, computer and IT skills, academic writing, referencing etc.

A good place for a DMU student to find out more about their DMU community and the support available is [DMU BaseCamp](#). Look out for links to relevant sections of DMU BaseCamp in this resource.

QUESTION – What kind of support do you think would be helpful for you? And who are you going to ask/where might you going to start to find out how to get this support?

NEXT SLIDES

What follows are some teaching scenarios, and questions for you to think about and ideas for how you can get the most out of each of these situations.



[A place to start and come back to throughout your journey at DMU](#)



SCENARIO ONE

The lecturer sets group work and encourages group discussion in a session.

ADVICE

Speak and give your views

Listen to younger students

Do ask the lecturer for clarifications and this can help other students too

Explain if you give examples and refer to times before younger students were born or aware

Take care not to dominate, as younger students can be more reluctant to speak compared with mature students

Make sure you are respectful and listen to the lecturer and other students, whatever their age

When you are questioning or commenting, try to ensure that the lecturer does not feel a need to be defensive

Ask other students questions about their views in order to help the group's discussions

Have a quiet word with the lecturer after the session, if you feel younger (or older) students are getting too much air time and attention

What's missing? Add your own new ideas for advice you would give to yourself and other mature students here

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Do you hold back and listen first, before putting your ideas forward?

Do you think that younger students' perspectives enrich your learning?

Maybe find someone to be a 'study friend', and maybe ask a younger student?

Are there other things that could go on, or be a problem, in group discussions and seminars involving mature students with younger students?

Add your own new questions here - for you to reflect on and consider

HERE I AM WHEN



IN FRONT OF CLASSMATES



IN FRONT OF THE TEACHER



Learning and Teaching



SCENARIO TWO

If you feel a teacher tells students what to do, without explaining why, and some mature students perceive this as too directive.

Mature Students' advice to each other includes to:

Remember teachers are doing their best, and may not realise how they come across

Recognise teachers may feel a bit intimidated by older students and feel unsure: you may be old enough to be their mum/dad or grandparent even

Think about how great teachers can have authority and what this might look like in a class – and think about how , but not come over as too directive (or even bossy..?)

Remind yourself not to be scared to ask for help, never feeling 'as an adult, I should know x, y z....

Think students of all ages are learning together from the expert teacher, students are all at the same level of study, and maybe sometimes students will need to be directed more by the teacher

Not stay quiet and do ask for clarifications or support

Consider having a quiet word with the teacher if you think there is a boundary being crossed

Not feel that the teacher is too busy and that you can't expect time from them

Wonder how you could help build a feeling of collaboration and mutual respect in the group, and with the teacher

Add your own pieces of advice for yourself here....





SCENARIO THREE

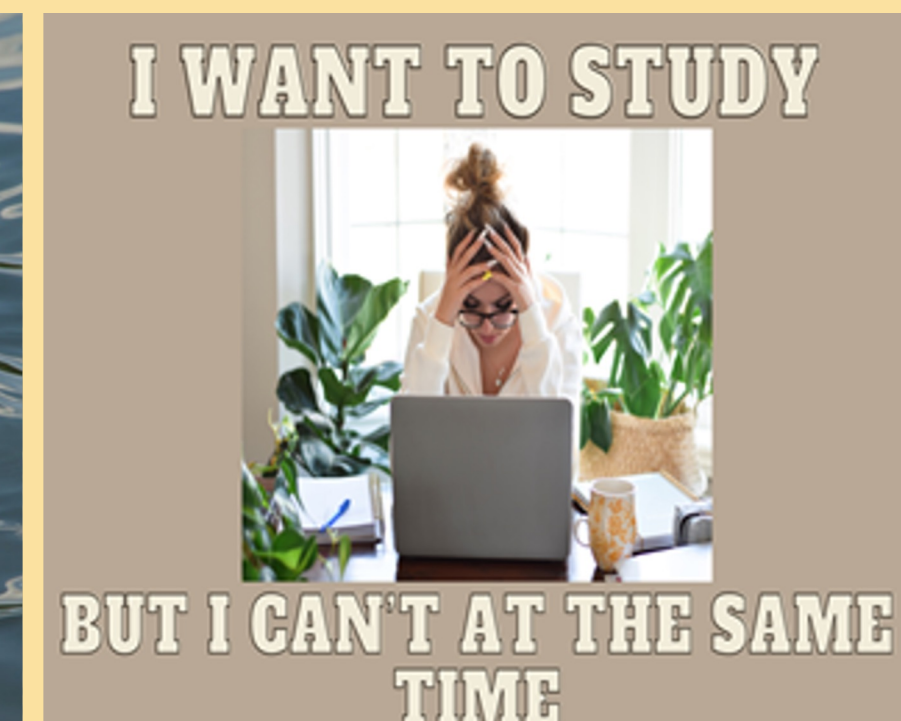
You are part-time but timetabling doesn't work with your job or family commitment.

DO ✓

- Talk with your personal tutor and/or course leader about the problems, and discuss which timetabled sessions are OK, and which sessions aren't and how or when they could work better for you
- Think about options that would help eg: swapping seminar groups etc
- Talk with your employer and/or family to see if some/all clashing commitments could be adjusted so you can go to most/all timetabled sessions
- Expect lecturing staff and managers to show understanding and empathy, and to make adjustments for you as far as possible
- Recognise that sometimes staff are not able to change a timetabled session or deadline, so ask them who might be better placed to help make changes for you
- Wonder if there are creative ways for timetabling problems to be overcome eg asking for a recording of a lecture etc
- Add your own 'dos' here....

DON'T ✗

- Stay silent and feel the University isn't working for mature students
- Add your own 'don'ts' below.....





SCENARIO FOUR

Some mature students say they get tired from learning new things.

Actions you might take

Make sure you are eating healthily, sleeping well and taking exercise - a healthy rested body helps boost learning

Look at ways you can plan and use your time most effectively, maybe asking the library about time management advice or workshops, or where to get support from

Take learning things in small step-by-step ways and not expect too much of yourself too soon

Take stock of what you have learned and gained since the first week, and tell yourself that you will continue to learn and overcome setbacks

Think of taking a break for an hour or two in the day, and talking with other students or your personal tutor about how you feel because this might help?

Add your own new actions here...

Questions you can ask yourself

Wonder if this is to be expected, and the early stages of learning new things can be especially exhausting

How can I ask for help eg from personal tutor or DMU's mental health support team if you feel that you may be getting too worried or feeling panic about learning and your course?

Wonder if there are other things you could do to help your grit and resilience?

Add your own new questions here.....



[Learning and Teaching](#)

[Assessment and Good Academic Practice](#)

[Support, Communities and Belonging](#)



SCENARIO FIVE I am falling behind and/or I feel a bit worried about my studies.

ADVICE

Think about ways you have built up your confidence in the past, and jot down ideas on what might help you feel more confident as a student, and how you can make progress on your course

Never think that you are too old to learn (people in their 90s have successfully learned new languages and gained honours degrees) – you will succeed too

Recognise that every student, whatever their age, feels now and again that they are not keeping up – this is normal

Start to make a plan about how you can catch up, maybe by adding small amounts to study time each day

Talk with your personal tutor, including if you feel lecturers are asking too much of you at this point

Don't panic – things will ease and get better

Do talk with other mature students (or younger students) and ask for their advice, and whilst explaining your issues, try not to moan as this can bring you down and other students too

Tell yourself that you will be able to catch up again, and do notice and make a note for yourself of each step forward you have achieved

Identify if this is a temporary set back of quite small proportions, or if this is a bigger problem

If you are worried about your mental wellbeing, seek help from the mental health team at DMU
Don't give up, as everyone has setbacks in their learning. Help is available from DMU.

Add your own new ideas for actions here.....

LECTURER SAYS



DONUT GIVE UP

you've survived 100% of your
bad days so far.



you can do it!



SCENARIO SIX

It is years since I wrote an essay, an assignment or took an exam, and I don't know where to start.

ADVICE

Remind yourself that you are not alone: many mature students, and young ones too, feel a bit lost about how to tackle their first essays or exams at University. This is normal

Find out about essay writing, study skills, revision techniques sessions offered through DMU's Library, Base Camp etc

Ask your lecturer if they have any tips for writing this essay or taking this exam, and if there any guidelines for you eg on Learning Zone or on powerpoint slides from their lectures

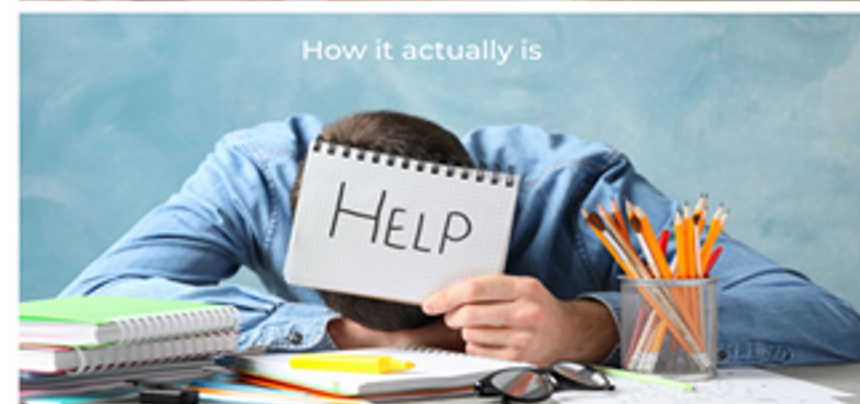
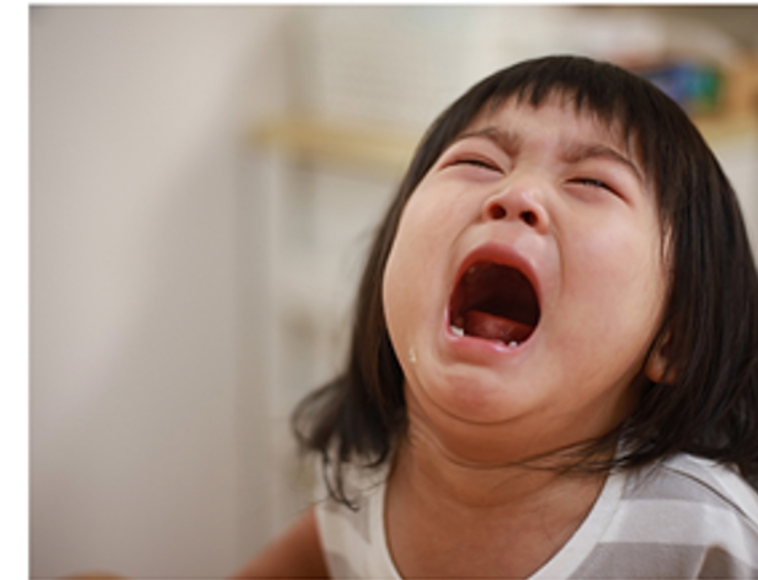
Remember any negative feelings about writing essays or doing exams are from the past, you now have so much more life experience, and this maturity will help you learn and succeed

Tell yourself that you are good at solving many problems in life, and here is another one you can solve

Think about making a plan for the essay or revising for the exam, and start to note down actions you want to take and by when

Add your own new actions here...

Me not having any idea how to write an essay





SCENARIO SEVEN I feel I don't belong as nearly all other students are younger.

ADVICE

Remember that DMU offers places to study to large numbers of mature students. The University sees your qualities and potential, and wants you to succeed – as mature students have done before at DMU

Know that younger students say they really like having mature student on their course as they bring different perspectives and so much life knowledge and experience too
Remember that academic staff value mature students and the ideas and experiences you bring to courses and group discussions.

Ask to talk with your lecturer and/or personal tutor if you are feeling left out, or lonely or scared of studying and explain to them how it feels as a mature student, what you think might help and ask for their advice

If you are feeling bad, do get in touch with the mental health team at DMU as they can help

Contact other mature students on your course, or on other courses, and chat with them about how it feels as a mature student, how they find the teaching so you can help each other

Wonder if lecturers and/or other students may be unaware that some things they do or say makes mature students feel a bit left out. You could take an individual to one side and have a quiet word, explaining that you know it wouldn't have been intended – 'but when you said/did xxx, that made me feel left out as a mature student, and can we talk about ways forward together'

With a few other mature students discuss ways mature students might support each other in their learning and with life at University. Together, you can feel a sense of belonging and happiness

Add your own new actions here...

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Wonder if all students at some point(s) and temporarily feel they don't belong?

Wonder what might help you feel you belong more, and who might help make these happen?

Wonder if your life and work experience is recognised, and how to draw on it for your learning?

Add your own new questions to yourself here.....



Support, Communities and Belonging



SCENARIO EIGHT

The younger students are so quick with IT and use it well for learning, but I have no confidence.

ADVICE

Expect to use IT in your course, and do take advantage of IT help available from DMU

Using a mix of pen and paper and IT can work for you, as it has done over time for mature students

Ask if a younger student will buddy with you and show you one or two IT applications they use and teach you

Go to the library and ask about IT workshops to help you

Ask the lecturer which IT applications would be most useful for you to learn first, for the course

See if any family members might help you learn one or two IT applications

Timetable yourself to learn and practise with IT for eg an hour or two a week

Wonder what other ways you might learn IT, and become confident and build up your skills

Remember that your course is preparing students for careers and next steps in life when they finish, and IT is part of everyday life and working life. We can all learn new things, including IT, however old we are

Add your own new ideas for advice to yourself on learning about IT here





SCENARIO NINE

Receiving feedback and understanding how to use it to develop can feel strange and hard.

DO



- Remember that critiques are intended to give pointers for development
- Feel proud of your achievements and the strengths recognised in the feedback
- Take a deep breath and try to see any weaknesses pointed out, or even failing an assignment or an exam, as important learning opportunities on the way to success. Learn as much as possible from them
- Ask your lecturer or course leader to talk over the feedback with you, if there are points that you don't understand and/or for suggestions on doing even better next time
- Remember that it is not you the person being assessed, it is just a particular piece of work or exam, at a particular time, on a particular part of the course
- Seek help if you feel distressed by the feedback eg talk with your personal tutor or mental health services at DMU
- Add your own 'dos' here....

DON'T



- Feel embarrassed that you received some negative feedback, as well as positives – a mixture is to be expected
- Have any sense of awkwardness if you got a lowish mark, or even failed a module – pretty much everyone does at some point
- Let yourself feel 'triggered' if this reminds of you being 'judged' at school or at work in a way that you felt was unfair – you are years older and wiser now, and being at DMU is not the same as school or work. The focus at university is on learning, including learning from mistakes and growing
- Let it get you down or feel alone, as mature students can find feedback harder at first as it might have been a while since you have received feedback on academic work. Don't forget to look forwards - onwards and upwards
- Add your own 'don'ts' below.....



RECEIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK





SCENARIO TEN I am living my dream. I want to learn so much and do well at DMU, for me and my family.

ADVICE

Remember not to expect too much of yourself

Take care not to let any family members or others pressure you to 'be the top student'

Remind yourself you are human, and you are learning new things after a gap of years since studying, so it will take time to feel you are really learning well and getting the most from DMU

Prepare so you are ready mentally for some setbacks, as there will be some, as well as for learning so many fantastic new things

Do your best, and know that nobody can ask for more

Know that age does not make us experts in advising and helping other younger students, even if younger students turn to you for help. You might refer them to the lecturer or suggest they talk with their personal tutor

Add your own new advice to yourself here...

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Should you 'never feel doubts or a lack of confidence' as a student?

Wonder what boundaries there might be in helping younger, or other older students?

Are you being accepting and kind enough to yourself?

Wonder if there is more you can do to manage your own and others' expectations so they are realistic?

Add your own new questions – and answers you might give to yourself - here.....

I'VE GOT THIS



A place to start and come back to throughout your journey at DMU