



Suggestions from your first year tutor: How to prepare for university and for the Neuroscience degree programme

By Dr Martina Wicklein

You've all had a very different school experience in the last year, with online lessons, remote learning, and lockdowns. For some of you, the way you will be assessed and what kind of exams you have will have changed. I guess you might feel stressed, a bit underprepared, but eager and ready to leave all this and school behind you to start your university journey. I get asked every year by offer holders what they can do to prepare for the start of university and I'm sure you might want to know this as well.

Below are my suggestions for what you could do to prepare for the UCL Neuroscience first year. This is NOT homework! What I would like you to do is to reflect, to think about yourself, your skills, your knowledge and be honest with yourself, and then decide if and where you could use some extra work. This self-reflection is in itself a very valuable skill that you will continue to develop over the course of your degree, so why not start right now?

Study skills

1. Brush up on your chemistry
2. Brush up on physics
3. While you do this, explore and widen the range of your note taking and revision skills: try different styles, flash cards, mind maps etc. The emphasis in our degree programme is NOT on learning facts (you will need to know the facts), but on being able to discuss, contrast, and work with the facts. Therefore, note taking and revision techniques that allow you to make connections, compare and contrast facts, will be best.
4. Brush up on mathematics. The emphasis here is on logical thinking and mathematical thinking skills; NOT on being able to solve an integral, rather to know what an integral means, when and how you can use it. Make sure you are utterly solid in percentages, fractions, decimals and how to go from one to the other, and the 'rule of three'. Work on real life mathematics problems and on word problems (yes, the awful 'A train leaves Manchester Central Station, the other train leaves Kings Cross at the same time...') and how to translate them into an equation and solve them.

5. Learn how to use spreadsheet software (e.g. Excel, Origin etc)
6. Try to get into coding, most useful languages for Neuroscience are Python and Matlab
7. WRITE, WRITE, WRITE! Our assessments are essay based, no multiple choice questions. You will be writing essays, reports, paper reviews right from the start in your first year. Most of you will have done relatively little extended writing, so it's a good idea to practice this. The focus is on clarity and logic of the expression, as well as that of the structure. Any writing you do will be beneficial.

General skills (most of you know these already, if not it's time to learn how to...)

1. Cook at least 2-3 dishes. If you can change the ingredients (with or without meat, different vegetables, different spices), so you can be creative and change your meal dependent on what's left in your fridge at the end of the week, even better. You basically cook the same thing, but every time you make a dish that is different, interesting and hopefully yummy.
2. Do your laundry
3. Clean your flat or room

Another important skill to learn is to stay connected and to communicate via electronic media. You will be really good at this already, so continue to use these skills and shift your focus to communicating via email. At university, and with us, your lecturers and tutors at UCL, you will communicate via email. Get into the habit of check your inbox regularly. You will receive updates from us, we will contact you with tips, general and specific information regarding studying at UCL and Neuroscience.

And don't forget to have a good summer, enjoy, relax and I hope to see you all eager, well rested and well prepared in September!