

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to the student hub live. In this session, we're going to focus on getting started with the Open University, so this session is aimed primarily at level one students. But of course, there will be information in here that's relevant to all students, and what we're really hoping is that you can share some of your experience in the chat box. Now I hear that people have been talking about some of the things that they wished they'd known when they were an Open University student, HJ and Priya.

HJ: Yes, well, we're on the food again. Coffee said if you knew how much coffee you would drink, you would have bought shares in the coffee company. And I think all the talk about cake and food we have, we better start going to the stock exchange, and getting some shares in those companies.

PRIYA: Oh yeah. Absolutely.

HJ: I definitely comfort eat while I'm studying. It's just to have something on the desk, isn't it?

PRIYA: Absolutely, it'd be great to know what your favourite study snack is. You know, if you found something that's really kept you going, yeah, just let us know.

HJ: But if there is something you wish you knew when you started, like a certain resource, or certain study tip, something you found out along the way. We'd love to hear it. I'm sure everyone starting out in the chat would love to know as well, and have that great advice from you.

PRIYA: Absolutely.

KAREN FOLEY: Perfect, now there are often so many really, really good tips which are worth picking up on and trying. OK, I'm joined by Paul Piwek, who is a senior lecturer in computing with the Open University, and you're going to talk us through some of the things that students may or may not know about already when they're starting level one. Now we've got a lot of widgets, these inter-activating tools. So if you could fill those in, you'll see they're bright, and colourful, and very, very easy to do. All you do on them is select the option that applies to you, so are you new to the Open University?

Which level are you studying? Just select the appropriate one there. Which best describes your area of study, and if you've accessed the Open University website site. And also, have

you found the are you ready quizzes? And we're going to start by looking at those pretty much the fast thing, Paul, so we've got some slides we're going to show you. Now these will be very small on your screen, but they'll just give you a rough indication of some of the resources that are available on the Open University website. So Paul, the first thing is to start thinking about am I right ready for study?

PAUL PIWEK: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: I mean, most people here will have signed up, so hopefully they will say yes.

PAUL PIWEK: So one of the things you mentioned is the are you ready for quizzes, so one thing those can help you do is to sort of give you a little bit of a diagnosis in terms of all the particular areas of preparation that you might want to spend a little bit of time on. For instance, over the summer if you say start in October. To find those, I think they will come up on the screen in a minute.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

PAUL PIWEK: So basically, if you know what course you're going to do, the easiest way to get to them is actually to just internet on your search engine with Open University. You'll get to the more detailed description at the study at EOU page.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

PAUL PIWEK: That page then has basically a tab which specifies what the entry requirements, or the am I ready for that particular module? So we see that here on the screen on these tabs there. It has a sort of little summary of what you need to do.

KAREN FOLEY: So here we can see the entry requirements, but of course, the Open University is mostly open access.

PAUL PIWEK: Exactly, yes.

KAREN FOLEY: Expect if you suddenly say, I'm doing credit transfer, and I'm all of a sudden diving into level two chemistry in which case there might be some requirements. But it's important to look at the entry requirements, why?

PAUL PIWEK: Because basically, that then means that when you actually start your studies, you are really ready.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

PAUL PIWEK: So what those sort of statements do is they give you a little over view. If you're in doubt, there is an opportunity to talk to an advisor, but there is also this quiz. And that's really the key thing, so most modules will have a quiz or some other resource. A way you can actually then hone in on say a particular area where maybe you want to prepare yourself a little bit more before you start on this level one module.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Now you mentioned the are you ready quizzes. We've asked people at home whether they found them. 78% said that they have which is brilliant news, and we'll show you what they look like for those of you who haven't. Some of you haven't yet accessed the Open University website, which you can start doing. There's loads and loads of really useful information there. So let's just have a look at this are you ready for the quiz, and some of the questions that you can see here. So Paul, what happens when students fill these in, and what happens if they're not ready? And does a big alert go to the Open University that says do you register this student?

PAUL PIWEK: Not at all. You can do this completely anonymously if you want. You can also log in, so you can later a look at your results again. But that's really up to you.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

PAUL PIWEK: It's really for you as a student to decide am I ready?

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

PAUL PIWEK: So as you saw there on that screen, there are different types of questions that it asks for. They're very--

KAREN FOLEY: And they'll be specific to each module. won't they?

PAUL PIWEK: They're specific to each module, although there's a lot of commonality because some of the things are just about have you actually had enough time to study? How are your language comprehension skills, maybe your English skills, which again, you would need on any level one module because then there will be writing, reading, listening, et cetera.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, and on some of the modules, we have various diagnostics. So we thought a slide to show students as well about getting ready for T112, which is the module that you're involved

with, and this is where there are questions that are a little bit more specific. Perhaps there are some things that might or might focus on whereas other modules might not, so here we can see on the screen some of the specific things there. Tell us what's important here.

PAUL PIWEK:

So here we have three things, so there is the comprehension. So this is, again, language comprehension that I would say applies to any modules. So it's sort of making sure that if you take say a short piece of text to what extent you can read and understand the content of that. And there's some little multiple choice questions on that. Then there's numeracy, so that goes more into sort of STEM related subjects I guess. And there's problem solving, and problem solving is a bit more about given that this is the second module where the students have picked up the sort of programming and problem solving skills. But again, what it does, so it has this traffic light system. So it will give you green, red, or amber. And basically, the idea is if it's all green, then you're ready. If there's some amber there, there's some links there as well to say, OK, here are maybe some open resources you could use to brush up on that particular skill.

If there is an item where it's red, that's not necessarily the end of the world. The advice then really is to talk to an advisor who can really advise you with regard to your specific situation, and what you might need to do to get ready. The aim in the end is to get ready. It's not to say you're not ready. It's about how can I get ready?

KAREN FOLEY:

How can you prepare? Yeah, and especially for students who are watching this now. They've got a good length of time before they start in September or October for the next module to actually do some of the things and be proactive. And we'll talk about some of those things that they can do, but I guess the take home point right now is that these aren't assessed.

They're not a requirement as such. They're there to help students, and to direct them where they need to. And you've got the useful links as well where students might need top skill on certain areas, and then I guess that takes the whole problem of trying to reflect and think about what you're good or bad, especially if you're new to the Open University. And you don't really know what it's all about, so these are really, really helpful.

PAUL PIWEK:

Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY:

So some of the things that you'll direct students to, we've spoken a little bit earlier about open learn and some of the content there. And we've got these lovely badged open courses box, and there were lots of study skills and a whole range of really, really brilliant material on open

learn. And there's also study at the OU as well, which has got some great advice on it.

So let's take a look at some of these box then, these badged courses on open learn. Just briefly so you can see what they look like, so here's a slide that shows some of the courses. And the really great thing about these is it tells you how long it's going to be at what level you've got, and gives you a whole range of options you can search using the search function. You can sort by certain areas, et cetera. So they're really, really easy to use, aren't they?

PAUL PIWEK: Definitely, and with the box actually, there's still a fairly limited number at the moment of 30 on there, so it's actually possible to browse all of them. A lot of them are about generic or transferable skills like beginning study at a higher education, or again, language skills, or numeracy skills. And they're really good for that, and typically, well, they actually all have the same format.

And so they take 24 hours to complete, typically eight sessions of three hours. You get some assessment throughout as well. So at the end, if you do that, you get a badge, and you can also then for instance show it on the social media, even on say LinkedIn, or other profiles. So you have some external sort of--

KAREN FOLEY: So where does the badge go? Is it just something you can say you've got?

PAUL PIWEK: No, it will actually then show say on your social media profile, whatever social media platform you are using. So you can really-- yeah, you get a badge.

KAREN FOLEY: A badge, and you can make something of it.

PAUL PIWEK: So somebody then, say an employer, or somebody who was just interested in how you are progressing, can actually see that it doesn't count as a credit to your actual qualification. But it's evidence that you have been active with regards to your area of interest and studies.

KAREN FOLEY: Your areas, and getting ready for study. No, that's perfect. And then open learns also go a whole range. That's another sort of way. I mean, the box will be within that also. So if you go to OpenLearn, you can find lots and lots of things. But also, perhaps if you're interested in a particular subject, or you just want to start learning something, again, a similar sort of format where you've got the level, and the hours, and the time, and a nice sort of outline of what's going to happen.

PAUL PIWEK: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: And choose something there.

PAUL PIWEK: So there, there's a lot more choice. There are over 1,000 different set of courses, often tasters of existing modules--

KAREN FOLEY: Because you have the search function here. You can just dive in and start. So you can search by a range of things. There are various tabs there. You can look at the latest courses. You can get by certain areas, et cetera, or you can just browse, and say, I really want to know about food and cake.

PAUL PIWEK: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

PAUL PIWEK: Yeah, and I would say that's in contrast with the book. There are some really good things for transferable skills. The wider open learn is if you're studying a particular topic like STEM, or art, or history that you can really find some modules specifically on the topic. And maybe already sort of get yourself prepared with regards to the knowledge of the content rather than the skills.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, and the thing I like as well about open learn is there are lots of articles on there. So it's not all big things. It's not like eight hours necessarily a week of this, that, and the other. But you can just go on and find a really topical relevant things like the Brexit Hub, for example, is a great source if you are trying to figure all that out. OK, so what are some of the things that students might then look at in terms of techniques? You've got some really, really great ones. This Pomodoro Technique, which I'm sure people at the student hub have mentioned before, and do keep sharing some of your tips and things that work for you. But aside from looking things up, doing a book, et cetera, what might be some of the ways that you'd recommend getting prepared?

PAUL PIWEK: Yeah, so the Pomodoro Technique is a really interesting one, so a colleague of mine is sort of really into that. And we've also sort of integrated into module material. The idea is basically-- so Pomodoro is-- well, tomato, too, in Italian. So it stands for kitchen timer, and in the shape of a fruit or a vegetable.

The idea is that when you're trying to set apart time for study, there can often be lots of interruptions, especially now a days also with digital social media. I find myself often, you

know, should I just check this Twitter feed quickly, or some Facebook? And that's not the optimal way to actually study for a sort of really concentrated period of time. So what a Pomodoro does, the technique does is say, OK, you set yourself a particular goal to study a particular bit of text maybe or content.

You plan what you particularly want to get out of that, and you set apart exactly 25 minutes for that. And then you set the timer, and you start. And you really take that as an uninterrupted piece of study, so you really don't want to sort of in the middle go and do some browsing or something else. If you do that, you really have to start a new Pomodoro again. So the idea is really in that way to sort of reinforce yourself to be a bit more disciplined with regards to that. The other thing then, the other component it has is once you've done your 25 minutes, then typically I'd advise to have a sort of piece of paper where you written down what your goal was, and you then take that off as a real physical action to sort of reinforce this idea that sort of gives you a little bit of stimulation, and to do the next one as well. Once you've done one, take a little bit of a break.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

PAUL PIWEK: A few minutes, and if you've done say four, then take a longer break. But all to sort of to really get to these very concentrated bits of study, and minimise sort of distractions. And if you get into that habit, it can be really-- with the ticking and with the physical time, it can really reinforce that pattern.

KAREN FOLEY: Because students who've registered, they can't see their module websites right now because they'll come to life just before the course starts.

PAUL PIWEK: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: Which is great, and when they do, they'll see then that things are often broken down into nice chunks. You can tick them off as you go on your study planner, and you have an idea like you do with open learn about how long things might take, et cetera. So you can carve out your time, but this whole idea about sort of finding time is important because I think one of the things students really struggle with is I've got eight, or 16, or 20 hours to find in a week, which can be very hard because when I started my study, and I thought I'll do that on a Sunday. That'll be fine between eight, and 24, whatever hours. And I just do the think, and of course, it never worked out that way. And equally sort of trying to pack it all in one day was clearly never going to work, but this 25 minute thing is quite interesting because there are two things going

on here.

One is the sort of idea of really focusing a goal with a limited time. And the second is not having any interruptions during that time, and really being able to focus. And that seems quite achievable because you could probably do that between x and y, or between the kids coming home. And you know, when they've got a snack, you could put that 25 minutes in, et cetera. So that's a useful thing for students to do. How could they start doing it now then if they don't have their course?

PAUL PIWEK: It's just going back to what you showed earlier on, so the box and the open learn material. So pick a bit there which really interests you, or some skill maybe which you want to develop. And maybe start doing that over the summer, but using the Pomodoro Technique.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, so they go do their diagnostic, think I'm all right. In which case, I'm going to do what I want, or maybe I should look at bit of this, this, and this. And then they can start doing those things, and again, really try and focus on how much time that's going to take, quantifying the task, and then going and doing it. What can go wrong? No, what can go wrong?

PAUL PIWEK: Well, there can, of course, be life events, which mean that you can't set apart enough time and. You have to sort of reschedule, so yeah, you have to be flexible. And you have to keep thinking on your feet, and keep going. But I think because of the change, especially with the Pomodoro so small, it is possible to always sort of find that 25. And it also makes it sort of-- but again, that's maybe my personal experience. It will be different from for other people. Just setting apart 25 minutes is sort of feasible and overseeable. And just getting started on that is also it's more doable than say saying, OK, now I'm going to study for two hours to finish this whole book or whatever.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

PAUL PIWEK: So yeah, it helps you to really get going in short spurts.

KAREN FOLEY: I wanted to talk about growth mindset because sometimes we can sort of think, especially if people are saying, well, I wish I had known this when I started studying. And you can sometimes think I'm going to be really, really diligent. I'm going to get everything matching in terms of all my stationary. I'm going to get a desk set up and the whole way or something. And I'm going to really, really focus on everything, and I used to buy a really lovely book. In fact, I didn't want to write in until I could write properly. Like I wasn't prepared to scribble on it, and it

really stopped me actually because I put all these barriers in place that I was going to be a perfect student.

And because I didn't have that mindset, I was really debilitated in the end because I couldn't just scribble notes on the back of a pen and paper. I had to draw diagrams. I had to sort of do things initially, and I wonder about how we can sort of get around this idea about working with stuff.

You're never going to be perfect writer at the start, and about how you sort of learn and grow, which is what I see in so many of my students. It's like I try this, not so good. Actually, I found this works for me, and then they'll talk to student. And they'll go, well, I do this, and then they'll that's a great idea. And it's all that building isn't it, and really growing with both what you've got available to you, and also who you are.

PAUL PIWEK: Definitely, yeah. So in the growth mindset, so this is something we'd share. There's research sort of programme by a professor at Stanford University, Carol Dweck, who sort of explored this over a long period of time. This really works, and it's contrasted with a fixed mindset. So the idea is really about how you think, how you envision yourself as a student. So I have equipped the particular capabilities and aptitudes, and those are fixed. And if I do, say in a quiz or a test, and I don't quite score as well as I thought as I'd hoped for, then your score confirms my image of where I am.

For instance, this growth mindset where you really think in terms of these aptitudes and capabilities. Things that you develop as study, and as you as you go on. And you also view the quizzes, and the tests, and the assessments, those opportunities to improve yourself. Notice opportunities to show necessarily where you are now, but to learn for what you're going to do in the next year or the next, or the next quiz basically. And you're continually trying to sort of make yourself better, and the nice thing is so that the real studies would show that if you have that mind set, this growth mindset rather than a fixed one, does really help. So then in the end in the long run, you actually you do better in terms of your studies.

KAREN FOLEY: It's very popular in schools, and I think this idea that failures are good, that learning happens with bad things. And then you start to revise and adjust is great, but for adults, especially maybe adults have had bad experiences of education. We were just talking about this beforehand. And coming to the Open University, they really build their confidence, and get their skills up and running and things. But equally sometimes as adults, I don't think we're so

up for failure are we as children are.

PAUL PIWEK: Definitely, and I think that there is, of course, where there is the formal assessment, there is this summative or sort of aspect to that. What I would say is make especially also a lot of use of the-- we've got lots of activities in the module materials. And there are also quizzes that are formative so they are not actually contributing to the final mark, and really make optimal use of those. Discuss that with other students in the forums, and on the module I'm sharing at the moment, we've got really constructive sort of discussions where in computing and IT, of course, we've got huge differences in terms of beginning.

So some students already programmes for years. Others have just started, and when you've just started, you might feel a bit unsure. But the discussions are really good, and students are helping each other on the way and building up confidence because everybody goes through that period when you start to do something new where you feel insecure. And you need to have that sort of little push to keep going, and not just say, OK, I'll give up. This is not for me kind of thing.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, because I think it's one of those things that a lot of students don't appreciate that from level one, it starts really easy, and nice, and gradually. And the assessment builds and builds. And everything's really well thought through and designed. So you don't have to have done anything, but I think that you do limit yourself if you haven't prepared. So it's almost this thing that we want to encourage students to sort of see why they're at, and do as much as they can do to just sort of prepare. But equally know that once they start, there's an awful lot of time, and it's not like it's day one. And it all kicks off from there.

PAUL PIWEK: Absolutely.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, OK. Let's take a quick trip to HJ and Priya, and see how everyone is at home.

HJ: I think we're all getting ready for our study, aren't we? There are some great tips being shared about things that we wish we'd known, and some resources we found along the way.

PRIYA: Yeah.

HJ: I think the top tip of the day though that Devin has is that we should move our study area closer to the kitchen just so the snacks are easier to get.

PRIYA: Closer to the snacks, absolutely.

HJ: I like that, but we're talking about all the resources available. So iTunes has a university section. The Open University is on there as well, so if you want to get into it, might have a look what's on there. And we had a great tip for before studying. Why don't we set out some time what we think is best for us to study, and maybe read a book. And then see actually is that the best time for us, so I really like that tip.

PRIYA: Yeah, I also saw mentioned on here to the guys joining us today about scheduling that extra time for social media. If you're going to use your social media, schedule that time in. Get the balance between study because study should be enjoyable, so think about spending time with your friends and family. And just balancing everything, and we've got some great useful tips on the help centre. So you could work out your timetable to help you manage your time.

HJ: A comment that's just come up is that someone said that the discussion about failure is of great comfort because it seems to be prominent in my studies. But now as we are progressing and moving forwards, confidence is building, and it seems there's more successes along the way, which fantastic to hear.

PRIYA: Brilliant to hear, absolutely.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, excellent. Thank you for those tips and things. And I think it's very important to realise that it's pretty hard to fail if you do a lot of stuff, and you talk to your tutor as well. You know, and those sort of times when things build up is really important to recognise that you're doing better. And it's actually really, really boring if you go and getting really, really good marks because your probably not being that challenged.

I wonder if sort of with that view we could look at post graduate studies because some students come to the Open University having never done undergraduate studies with us, and they'll come. And in fact, this afternoon, we're talking about an MA in Crime and Harm, and an MA in Philosophy, and some of the programmes that are available through arts and social sciences for example, as there are with many other of the faculties. What's different the post graduate students coming to the OU, and what do you think they should need to know for starting out?

PAUL PIWEK: So I think the key thing is with undergraduate studies was one of the aim is to become an independent learner as you move through the levels. And at the end, ideally, you're able to sort of set your own pace, and to do your own studies, and to pick a topic and sort of brush up

on that. With the postgraduate studies, a masters and also a PhD, it's actually more about not so much becoming a learner, but becoming a researcher. And so the big difference there, I guess, is especially also when you come towards sort of what's sort of the end aim? So do your own project, maybe a research project. During your undergraduate studies, you might do a particular assessment or a particular bit of work. And there is typically-- you're true to the market. They will have some kind of model answer, which says this is roughly what we expect.

When you get into research, that's not quite the case anymore. You're really starting to formulate your own questions, and think rigorously about how can I answer this in a systematic way? So people who are in the know in that field, accept or are persuaded by the arguments that you provide. So it's a different level of sort of independence almost. You really need to get away from this mindset that there is somebody who knows the right answer because there isn't. You are really building the answer, and that can be quite challenging. But it's also extremely exciting because that's really what research is about.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, no, excellent. I want to ask about your own research actually because you do something very interesting, which is on question generation. What is that?

PAUL PIWEK: So this is a sub-area of what's known as artificial intelligence basically within that language process, so what we're working on is within computing algorithms switch. Take data or text taught on computers, and turn it into text again. You might come across that sort of translation algorithms are sort of the classical example, but more recently, there has also been a lot of interest in take a bit of text. And it could be OU course material, or it could be leaflets. And generate a question about that text with the idea, for instance, that you could then use those questions to rehearse that content.

So that is something we didn't really discuss earlier on, but what one really good way of practicing or making information stick in a bit of learning content is really two once you've read the text, to ask yourself some questions. Or use the activities in the model materials, and go through those. So you really become aware of the things that you haven't picked up yet, and the things that you have. So what we're trying to do is build technology, which as well can ideally what would be sort of the vision for the future is that you have a bit of course material you've selected. And you press a button, and it will generate a couple of questions on the fly, which you can then use to practise with and really understand. A lot of that is still very much in research.

KAREN FOLEY: Wow.

PAUL PIWEK: Actually, I wouldn't say that that's in the next year.

KAREN FOLEY: No, but it would make writing those questions so much easier when we do them. That's one thing, I think, actually that people new to the OU might not quite understand. And if we may and then all that sort of idea that often you will read a piece of text, and then you'll get these questions. We've talked about them being maybe reflective questions, or they might ask you certain things. And sometimes things that you might think, oh, I'm not going to bother thinking about that, et cetera. But when you're on your own in respect of whether you're doing undergraduate or post graduate research, those questions are the things that would be the equivalent of talking to other people in the classroom. So how important is it that people engage with those sorts of activities?

PAUL PIWEK: Yeah, extremely important. So again, there is actually a lot of research in psychology and education going back over a century where people have looked at this. And really it has been shown that just reading a bit of text, again, doesn't really make it stick as well as actually either answering somebody else's question, or you yourself sort of thinking about what did this piece of text, or video, or activity want to convey to me? And sort of rehearsing that to yourself, and that can really make the difference between whether something really sticks or not. And also sometimes you might have a bit of content say, but you feel, oh, I really understand is this. This all reads wonderfully. That's actually when you start to ask questions about it. You realise, well, actually I didn't really know what they meant.

KAREN FOLEY: And we'll show you a slide just of an example of one of those self-assessment activities just so you can see, but they will be something very familiar. So here you can see it's a checking and logic circuit. And this is an optional activity. Some you'll see optional, some of the things, but it's just, again, a key thing that you should really certain think about. And maybe write a note in your notebook as well, and that will really enhance your learning. It's not something you send to the tutor, but it's one of those self-directed areas of study that's very important.

PAUL PIWEK: Absolutely. This happens to be an example of a self-assessment, so the ideas with those that either the answer is hidden, or it's in the back of the book. So the idea is really to think about it yourself before you sort of turn to the answer. Then there are also exploratory ones, which are more about starting with a new concept, and the ideas that you think about for yourself a little bit first. And in those cases, there isn't always necessarily correct answer, so there will then be

sort of a discussion that you can compare with your own thoughts. And that's really just getting that thought process going is really the thing that--

KAREN FOLEY: And once you've thought about it, like you said, it's more likely to stick, and you're more likely to understand it. And it's a really important part of learning, brilliant. Paul, that's been an excellent session. Thank you so much for all your advice. We've got some of Paul's resources on the resource page of the student hub live website, so we've called links to some of the books there. Taking your first steps into higher education, succeeding with math digital literacy, and an introduction to cybersecurity is just some of the options. But again, as we say, you can go onto open learn, and search for yourself using those variety of search formats that we've shown you. OK, we're now going to take a quick video break, and look at the barrel building on one of our campus tours. And then we're going to come back looking at moving on up, so moving between levels with Rachel Penny. We'll see you in a few minutes.