

## SHL 88 Final module assessment: Making it your best! — 5 May 2021

KAREN FOLEY: Hello, everybody, and welcome to Student Hub Live. Well, it's great to be here today with so many of you. My name is Karen Foley, and I'm a lecturer here at the Open University. And I'm the presenter of Student Hub Live, which is the OU's online space to facilitate academic community. And I'm hoping some of you are brand new to Student Hub Live. But broadly speaking, we've got interfaces like this. And we also have lots and lots of workshops in Adobe Connect, which I will fill you in on a little bit later. But it's lovely, as I say, to have so many of you here today.

So let me just explain briefly how it all works. Well, there are heaps of you. We've got hundreds of people here today, which is absolutely wonderful.

And in the chat you can talk about anything you would like to. You can talk about how you're feeling. And I hear you've been talking about how music helps you relax and how important snacks are, which are all very good topics of conversation. But you may also have other questions that we can help you with.

And so to facilitate our chat today, I am joined by HJ on his social media desk and also the lovely Jamie, who I'll introduce you to later, who is in the chat from our student support team. HJ, how's everything going with you? I bet you're glad you don't have an EMA to do today.

HJ: Oh, I do miss it. But EMA time is always so exciting. So we're having a good time in the chat introducing ourselves. And it's great to hear where everyone is as well.

So Gillian's doing her last EMA ever. Caroline's doing her first EMA. Joanne's doing her first exam, which is rather frightening. But I always say that we get nervous about the things we care about. So it's a good sort of nervous. And Martin's wishing us all the best in Japanese as well. So I suspect we might have a languages student among us.

But the chat's for anything and everything. So our guests would love to hear from you. And we've got so many great, experienced students and new students as well. So if there's any tips that you want to share with us, we definitely want to hear it.

And because there's so many people in the chat, the chat does go a bit fast. So we've got that Pin button in the top right-hand corner. Just click that and it lets you scroll through. But yeah, myself and Jamie are in the chat today.

Jamie is a senior advisor for STEM, so he can definitely help us out with all our great questions. And I know Karen said she spoke to her student support team for advice. And they were absolutely brilliant. So we're all here to help. Anything goes in the chat. And our guests would love to hear your thoughts, comments, and questions as always.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely, HJ. And I'm sure you'll be very busy there today, as will Jamie. Let's see if we can show you a picture of Jamie, who will also be on the chat, from our student support team. So here's Jamie Ireland.

He has promised to do his very best to answer every single question that you can throw at him. You might want to put a Q in front. And because, as HJ says, the chat can move really, really fast. If he doesn't answer, please do ask again because we want to make sure that we do get to cover everything today.

As I say, we've got other workshops coming up. These will also all be recorded. So if you prefer, you can just chill out, chat to everyone, and watch the catch up a little bit later on today. It's your time, your space. And you can also change the interface. So if you don't want to see the chat scrolling, you can make the screen bigger or you can make it smaller. So just play around with those little icons on the bottom right-hand side of your screen. Well, let's get on with our programme.

We've only got an hour. And we've lots of things that we wanted to cover. This session is trying to help you to think about your best EMA. OK, so whether it's your first or your last end of module assignment - be that a written piece like a TMA, tutor-marked assignment, or you may have one of our remote examinations - this is a chance to really think about the year of studying that you've done and how you can best portray all of the experience that you've been able to build over the last academic year.

So, joining me today - I am joined by three key people who I'm going to introduce you to. First, we have Carlton Wood. Some of you may recognise him. Carlton is an associate dean in STEM. But he is also deeply involved with the assessment programme. So I thought he'd be great to come along today to give us some strategic insight.

I also have Isabella Henman, who leads on the Adobe Connect workshops that we do, that we're also running again in the future. And Isabella is a tutor also in STEM. It's a very STEM-heavy focused event today. But that's just how the cookie crumbles sometimes. And Isabella will be talking about things from a tutor perspective.

And the lovely Elaine from our student support team as well is an educational advisor. So much like Jamie, she deals with student experiences. And she's got some great advice to do as well to prepare and also to fire fight, should the worst thing happen, which I think we've all decided is that the electricity goes off or something like that. Anyway, Wi-Fi seems to be the greatest commodity of all time.

So welcome, everyone, today. And in the chat we've got a few questions that we'd like you to think about as well as everything else. We'd like to know what the best, most impressive procrastination thing you have ever done when you I don't want to do what it is you're doing, because we've had some wonderful stories about people doing various sorts of things. So you might like to share with HJ in the chat some of the stories that you've had, whether you have not wanted to do the ironing, for example, or an assignment. So do let us know what you think about that.

Right, Carlton, let's start with you then. I'd like to think about being strategic. Because for students with any sort of thing, in particular an end of module assessment that may be a written task, there's lots going on right now. We've often got maybe multiple assignments happening. So what advice can you give to students about really thinking about that end piece of assessment within the context of the whole module?

CARLTON WOOD: So the idea for the end of module assignments is it's meant to allow the student to go back over the whole module, really. So the key thing is know early what the task is. So clearly, have a look at the EMA. If it is an EMA, you've got it a long way in advance. So look to see what kind of questions it's asking. And look to sort of see the kind of resources that you've got that you can use to be sort of deployed against it.

So for instance, going back over TMA answers and the feedback that your tutor's given you is clearly a really, really good idea. But there's other resources - obviously, the module material as well. If something is not obvious in the EMA, you can always ask your tutor to try and perhaps help clarify a question, or to give you a pointer in the right direction.

If you're getting a bit too close to what the answer might be, the tutor is not allowed to go there, and perhaps will suggest you ask the question a different way. But there's no harm in asking. So I think it's a look at all the, kind of, information that you've got at your disposal. And bring that to bear on the EMA, really. Don't just go straight into the EMA itself.

And also, look to see what types of questions are asking, and exactly what it is that you're being asked to do. So you might have a choice of a question. Or there might be a certain number that you have to answer. So know all of that kind of stuff before you start on it. So be prepared.

KAREN FOLEY: Because, Carlton, very often, right at the beginning of the module, we look through that assessment booklet, and we're very familiar with exactly how much each TMA matters. But coming towards the end of it, perhaps we've forgotten a little bit about that. And the end of module assessment seems like the most important thing ever.

But strategically speaking, often it accounts for some, not all of the marks. So what advice would you give to students about maybe considering the weighting, the contribution, of marks that each assignment makes towards the overall qualification. And also, might you add something there about the levels at which this really, really matters.

CARLTON WOOD: So most module teams make the weighting on the EMA a reasonable amount. But as you've just said, it's not the totality of the marks. And more often than not, what you've done in terms of the continuous assessment part of the module in terms of the TMAs, or the iCMAs perhaps, frequently adds up to 60, 70 per cent of the marks that are available.

So the EMA is not like the sort of killer thing, if you like, where if you fail that, that's it. Particularly with what we have, what we call a single component assessment the moment, where everything adds up, most students have got quite a considerable number of marks in the bag already. And depending on the assessment strategy of the module, may have well have actually already passed the module already, even before they go into the EMA. So it's a case of knowing what the assessment strategy is for your module, and knowing how many marks available for the EMA, and whether it's essential to actually submit the EMA or score a certain percentage on the EMA. So being aware of what the assessment strategy is for the module is also quite important.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, it's absolutely vital. We had some heartbreaking stories on my module of students who'd done so well on the three of the four assignments. And they thought, well, I don't need to submit because I've already got enough marks to pass. And we couldn't pass them because the assessment criteria was that they had to submit something for that final assessment. So it's so vital, isn't it, that you know what you need to do and what thresholds you need to reach.

CARLTON WOOD: Exactly. And I think sometimes it can be difficult for students because some students take more than one module. So they perhaps know the assessment strategy for one module and then just assume it will be the same for a second module. And that's often not the case.

So it's really, really important that you check what the assessment strategy is. And if you're unclear, go away and check up because it is very important. Because, as you just mentioned there, Karen, sometimes students think they've passed because they've scored perhaps 60 per cent of the marks, but they don't realise that you have to submit the EMA. And if you don't, then that's what we call thresholded. And, therefore, if you don't get over that threshold, just by submitting something, then you potentially fail. And just by submitting a blank sheet of paper or a few lines, that would be enough to make the difference. But students don't often realise that.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. No, that's absolute perfect. So top tip there is to go through that guidance and see exactly what the criteria is for your particular module in terms of the weighting, and what you need to do to achieve each.

Now, Carlton, another question I had for you. Some students who maybe have six pieces of work - so they're on TMA 5 at the moment - perhaps could submit that after the end of module assessment. So the different rules and regulations in terms of when the final date for completion is, and when students need to get things in on time, what would you say to students who've maybe got two pieces of work coming up?

CARLTON WOOD: That's a tricky question. That's a loaded question, I think. So, how best to go about answering that? The University has made some changes to some of the rules because of the pandemic. And what some modules do is - or what some students are allowed to do - is allowed to submit what we call a final TMA by the 8th of the month afterwards.

So if it was a cut off would be in April, they'd be able to submit it by the 8th of May, and same with May going into June. But the issue with that is to be really careful about knowing when the cutoff dates are for the various pieces of work. But you're right. It is possible that, say you had 5 TMAs and an EMA, it is theoretically possible to submit the fifth TMA after the cutoff date for the EMA.

All EMA cutoff dates are fixed. And if you miss that cutoff date, then effectively you potentially fail the module if that EMA is thresholded. So it's really important to know when the cutoff dates are. But theoretically it is possible to submit that to get an extension on the last TMA - not the EMA, just the TMA - and therefore submit it after the cutoff date for the EMA.

And often, if you look at the weightings, again, that final TMA might only be worth, say, 10 per cent, and the EMA might be worth 30 or 40 per cent. So you might be better off concentrating on the EMA and then going back to the TMAs subsequently. But you just need to be really careful in terms of what is the last permissible cutoff date for those two final pieces of work.

KAREN FOLEY: I've had extensions, therefore I can get an extension on the end of module assignment. And that's not the case. And it's very important that you get that in on time. Let me go to HJ and see how Jamie's doing, actually, on answering everyone's questions.

HJ, I hear there are some really interesting procrastination stories. So tell me about Luke washing his neighbour's car.

HJ: I know. I think I have to get everyone over my house when it's TMA time. There will be so much done. But yeah, Luke likes to wash his neighbours cars. That's quite a good one.

Victoria waters the house plants. Celise started running. Jeanette - I like this one - eats chocolates and makes cups of tea. I think she's watched Student Hub before - definitely a Student Hub Student.

Lisa likes to clean the oven. Melanie learns Spanish. And Janine built a shed. Nancy defrosted the freezer. And Anne just decided to leave the country and book a trip to Prague, which I can't blame her.

These are my favourite ones. So Sarah procrastinates on one module by working on another module.

That's kind of a bit of an infinite loop there, isn't it, of doing modules. And Emma says, my house is cleanest when I have a TMA due. That's definitely the case with me. I am a master procrastinator.

And we've always said, if they had a OU degree in procrastination, we'd probably forget to register for it. We'd just put it off.

KAREN FOLEY: And the one I particularly like as well is cat videos. And I'm surprised you didn't mention that, HJ, being such a cat fan. But I used to think, oh, wouldn't it be brilliant if I got the perfect cat video, and then hours later - I mean, it's so hard to find the perfect funny cat video.

HJ: Absolutely.

KAREN FOLEY: But one must, at points. Brilliant. And is Jamie answering people's questions? How's he doing?

HJ: Oh, Jamie's doing absolutely fantastic. I'm so glad we've got an expert in the room. And we were talking about struggling with references, and Jamie linked us to the great OU library reference resources that they have. So they've got a really good Harvard guide. And, as well, they've got that 24-hour chat feature.

So I remember writing my EMA. And I was so panicking in the middle of night. But I knew I could just hop on and get help with my references at like 2 o'clock in the morning. So there's loads of support out there and Jamie's definitely helping us - point us in the right direction to where we could get support for our EMAs.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you very much, HJ. Good. Well, keep chatting. Carlton, can I return to you then and just think about some of those students who may have exams? Because I think there's something we can do in terms of planning our time and approach and strategy for those exams. Now, many students in STEM will have a remote exam this year. So what's your advice about thinking about planning and being strategic in that aspect?

CARLTON WOOD: Right. There's lots you can do around exams. So the key thing, particularly this year of all years, is to look at the specimen paper that's been created especially for this year. So look to see, and it sounds silly, but how many sections does your exam have? How many questions do you need to answer? What are the weightings within those sections?

Don't go on, necessarily, on previous papers because previous papers may have a different structure to what the current one has this year. So all module teams produce an exam paper to be taken remotely. And at the same time, they produce a specimen paper to give you some idea of the type of question, but also the structure of the actual paper itself. So it's really important that you look to see what the structure is for this year, and then plan accordingly around that.

So you will know how much time that you're allocated for your particular exam. Some of them - they vary. So some of them, you've got, say, a four-hour exam and you have to take it within a 24-hour period. Sometimes it's an exam within three days. So it's a know how much time you've got, and work out when the best time is that you can allocate to that particular exam.

So if you know you've got, say, a four-hour exam, and if you've got, say, childcare or other kind of care responsibilities, how can you organise your day so you know what time that you intend to take the exam and stand the best chance of being able to concentrate at it whilst you're doing it.

KAREN FOLEY: And it's very important to bribe everybody else, including the animals in the house so that you've got that head space to be able to focus on it. So thanks, Carlton. Elaine, I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about calculating theoretical grades. Many students know about the assessment calculator, many do not. So can you tell us a little bit about how it works and why it can be handy at times like this to be able to think about what we need to pass a module?

ELAINE WALKER: Ah yes, this follows on from - really from Carlton talking about knowing the assessment strategy for each individual module. Each individual module should have also an assessment calculator. If you haven't found it, now's the time to find it.

It's in the middle part of student home. There's a little link to your module. And in there is something that says assignments. And under that you'll find the assessment calculator.

And the assessment calculator is great because here you can play fantasy results and give yourself a grade 1. And basically, once you've found it, you can put any kind of numbers you like into the missing part. So it populates automatically with the results you've already got for your TMAs or your iCMAs. And then it leaves blank the parts you have yet to do.

So you can put any numbers you like in there. You can put in 100 per cent. You can put in 0. It's up to you on that front what you put in.

But what it will then show you is what kind of pass grade you will get. And it will also allow you to see the details of that calculation. So it's like everything - it's about knowing exactly what you need to do. And because of that, you can then see the effects of everything. So, as we were talking before about, maybe, a fantasy TMA 5 that you might need to do and what it might be worth and the EMA, you can see how that balance might work out and where your effort needs to go to get the marks that you need to pass, because passing is the first aim. And then getting the potential grades on top of that is the next aim on top of that.

KAREN FOLEY: Perfect. Thank you, Elaine. So we'll all go and have a look at that. Now, Isabella, I wonder if we could follow on from that. Because while it's all very good theoretically playing around with numbers, it can be very difficult to achieve them.

And very often, when I ask students what they'd like to achieve, they will say, oh, I'd be happy with 85 per cent or more. But then we start looking at how much time, and resource, and energy, and maybe reading they've done, and we realise that sometimes we may have to adjust expectations. So what can you tell us about being the master of your own destiny in this whole end of module process?

ISABELLA HENMAN: I think my key thing there is to think about what you want to get out of it. So when we're doing the online workshops, I often say about it, it's your own learning journey. And it's great to see what other people are doing. It's great to think about what other people are doing.

But it's your learning journey. You may be learning because you want to for interest value. You might be learning for a future career. You might be learning for an ongoing career. You might be learning for family reasons, to find out more about a member of your family or something like that.

What do you need to get out of it? And that's actually an advised word, the word need, because sometimes you might need to get something. Sometimes you might want to get something.

But also then think, OK, this is what I would like to do in the time I've got available, given the fact that you might have all sorts of other things, including sleeping, to do, how much time have you realistically got to be able to do something? To think, right, it's my destiny. This is a short term period. What can I get done in that out of what I would like to get done?

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. That's a very good start. I mean, and I for one - I've broken my wrist, Isabella, which, as you know has resulted in quite a shift of my ability to do things quickly. And I'm normally one of these to-the-wire people. I know exactly how much time I've got and when I've got to do it, including all my burpees, which were the cause of this rather dull injury.

But anyway, the point is that sometimes things can go wrong. And we can have to shift our expectations. Sometimes things happen, including maybe having a vaccination jab that floors us for a week, or something like that. So I think it's important for students to realise that. But it can be difficult to get your head around.

And it can also be difficult, I think, sometimes to think, well, maybe I don't have quite as much time. But we have still had the whole year's worth of learning. And it's about them pulling all of that together and not feeling too distraught about something happening in the short term that could then really impact on the long term.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah, I think the problem is we have this catastrophising idea - think, if I don't do this, then I'm not going to pass this with the mark I want, which means I can't do this, which means - and then that's the end. I saw some kind of film which did that recently. And I thought, yeah, that's really interesting, because we do that.

I've done it in the past, when I thought, if I don't get this, then it's going to affect that. But actually step back and think, OK, if you don't get the mark that you really, really want, what's the worst that can happen? Actually, the worst that can potentially happen is that you don't get your grade for that particular module.

OK, so if it's the very last module of your final degree, it might affect your overall grade. But if it's not that, what else can you do? Level 1 - Carlton was talking earlier - and the assessment calculator that Elaine was talking about is so useful because it actually gives you a realistic idea.

Access level 1 don't count towards your final grade. So yes, we all want to do as well as we possibly can. But it's not actually going to matter. As long as you pass the module, it's not going to matter.

But then have a look - and there's all sorts of calculators - I'm never quite sure where they are - that work out your overall grade. But think about that. Be really, really sensible of going, what's the worst that can happen if things go wrong. The worst that can happen, you might have to do the module again.

OK. That's not what you want. But it's not going to ruin everything. So I know we have this tendency to get really, really worried. And I do it myself and I get all het up. But actually, it won't be the end of your study career if something does happen.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, I'm going to ask Elaine about all of that in a little bit because we have a section called, what's the worst that can happen. So I know everyone's talking about vaccinations and stuff right now. But if you can think of the worst thing that could possibly happen, sometimes it helps to think about that big catastrophe. And maybe then think about some of the ways around it.

But we're going to come on to that just a little bit later, because there are some things that we can do in addition to that. So yeah, Isabella, we've also got some workshops coming up, haven't we, on planning for your remote exam, and planning for your EMA that are going to have lots of practical advice on there.

ISABELLA HENMAN: We have indeed. So we've got one of those next Wednesday, which I think is the EMA, but I might have to look on my calendar.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes, it is. And then the exam one is the week later, yes. Yes.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah. And what's really good is that some faculties - given the fact, quite a few of us are from STEM here - STEM is doing a remote exam 1. So have a look out. Look in your module news or in your degree path news, because there was a number of places that are actually doing dedicated remote exam sessions, which will give you a lot of details.

We did do them in Student Hub Live last year when remote exams were for the first time. So you can always go into the Adobe Connect room and look at the recordings that we did last time with lots of advice there. But it's definitely worth looking out for things and planning.

Carlton was saying about planning ahead and thinking about what you need to do and making use of resources. I'm always going on about making use of the resources that are there.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely, including our time management workshops. So you can watch all the recordings there, but that may be a particularly useful one as well. Elaine, thinking about then planning for the exam - and I know the student support team normally, when we didn't have remote exams, would offer all sorts of really practical advice about getting to venues, having home examinations and things. What is the student support team doing now to help students prepare for exams? And what sort of insight can you give, in particular the examinations I'm thinking of right now that are going to be remote?

ELAINE WALKER: Right, well I think the critical thing is it is still an exam. I think it's great because a lot of people are going to feel a bit more relaxed because they're going to be at home. But you still have to think of it as an exam, and therefore plan and prepare for that. And so one of the things that the student support team can help - along with your tutor as well - is about preparing you.

So if you've got questions about, what's going to happen with my exam and things like that, you can contact the student support team about that. Or, you can talk to your tutor about that as well. Because remember, it is very module specific.

I don't think we can overemphasise that, because each different module will have different things in place. So be clear about that. If you are doing more than one module, make sure that you've got a clear account of what you're going to have to do for each one, and that it is different, and the timing and everything with that - so things where we can help clarify and help prepare the rules.

For those that have got some kind of disability, adjustments still need to be made. And we have been asking students about that. And the deadline for that has gone. So if you've suddenly woken up to the fact that something's happening, you do need to speak to us very urgently about that - if anything needs to be put in place, if you've got some kind of disability. But those are the kind of things that we've been working at with students.

KAREN FOLEY: That's brilliant. Thank you very much, Elaine. And Lisa says that her tutor says that she should include information from throughout the whole module and it's really stressing her out. She says it's about creating too much information for the EMA. How can I approach it in a better and less complicated way?

This is, I think, one of the key things, whether it's an exam or an end of module assessment, but particularly an end of module assessment, is this whole notion of balancing breadth and depth, because EMAs are distinct from a TMA because they'll often include something from throughout the module, not necessarily the entire module. But there will be aspects of the module that you'll be expected to include. Maybe it's integrating themes, combining different topics. And so it's fundamentally distinct from a TMA, which often focuses on one or two key areas.

Isabella, I just wonder if we can sort of think about that notion of breadth and depth in particular around planning, and how students might think about various aspects within that so that they don't get too stressed out about it. You can't cover everything in a limited word count.

ISABELLA HENMAN: No, you can't. So it says it's about the whole module. But it's not every single word of every part of the module that you've been doing so far. What it is the learning that you gained through the whole module.

So look at the question. What's the question specifically asking you to do? It's not saying repeat the whole module. It's not saying bring everything out.

What it's saying to you is, answer this particular question using the information you've learned from the module. Now, of course, you may well have forgotten some of the things that you were learning early in



the module - October and November - because all sorts of things happen. So that's where looking back over your feedback, looking at things like learning outcomes, looking at summaries and so on - the key parts - look at your notes. What bits did you want to pull out?

Part of it is about revision. So you need to go through everything. You can't be expected to have memorised everything. There's very few people that have got that kind of memory.

But it's about going, what is the question asking? Is it asking me, for example, for three examples? If it's asking me for three examples, where can I select those from? If it's asking me for seven examples, where can I select those from?

If it's asking for three, you don't need to give seven. Likewise, if it's asking you for seven, if you only give three, you're not giving enough. It might not be that there is a number given. But this, seeing as you were saying, Karen, the word count - if you've only got 100 words, there's not much in there. If you've got thousand words, OK, there's more to be thinking about.

But sometimes it is a case of, do you name a whole series of different examples? Or, do you select some so that you can develop? And that's the difference. So the naming a whole series, that's the breadth. Selecting one and doing it in detail, that's the depth.

Sometimes you have to go, right, which one is going to answer the question best? Is the case that I have to name a whole series of different facts? Or is it the case that I have to select, for instance, a number of theories and develop those. And we were talking about theories in the student hub live session last week. So it is a case of, look for your guidance.

Look at - there's this word we call rubric, R-U-B-R-I-C. And it's the bit that people - the fluff around the question, some people think of it as - but it's actually the bits that give you guidance.

Does it say, read this? Does it say, look at these learning outcomes? Does it say, using topics 3 and 7? If it says that, pay attention to it, because that's obviously there for a reason.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, I used to come out of psychology exams and people would go, oh, I don't know how I went. But I wrote everything I knew about memory. And so sometimes there's this whole approach that we have where we think, let's just dump it all out and see what comes back. And I don't know if any of you have marked exams, but sometimes you're literally saying, where is your answering of this question? I think that answering the question is the absolute fundamental thing here. That's so hard because we see in a module book, or text, so many things about a particular study or theory. But actually, it's really hard to be confident in distilling what really matters about that theory in terms of answering the question.

Isabella, you were telling me about a time that you didn't know what you were on about. But you managed to answer the question, and thus convinced your examiner that you should be awarded a pass. So tell us about that.

ISABELLA HENMAN: Well, it's tough. It's one of those times where - and I'm sure, Carlton, you're great at this, because you talk convincingly. And people go, oh, yeah, I know what we're talking about. Sometimes it is genuinely the case that if you talk convincingly - there are various rude words that we could actually say here along the way. But if you talk convincingly, and you've got something there, they'll actually - I'm not saying make things up. I'm not saying lying. But sometimes it is a case that - be confident in what you know.

You've come this far. You do know things. One of the examples, actually, that this brings to mind wasn't actually me talking confidently, was somebody else at medical school around the anatomy table. And he

just used to take over. And he just used to - and I was sat there thinking, I don't actually know whether what you're saying is correct.

But I didn't have enough confidence at that point - the 18-year-old me didn't feel like saying, well, actually, no, you're wrong. But yeah, it is sometimes the case. But this is the benefit of a remote exam.

And to be honest - I'm probably going to steal the thunder from later - you can go and check. You don't have to have memorised everything because you're not going and sitting in the exam hall without your books. You do still have access.

You don't have access to go off and search for everything because you don't have time. But you still can check things. And remember, you've got this far. You know a lot of what you're talking about.

If you've got as far as the EMA, as Carlton was saying, you've done all these bits before, haven't you? You've passed a lot of the things.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely.

CARLTON WOOD: There's a really interesting point around that. There's a really interesting point around that, Isabella, I think, in terms of the remote exams and timed nature. So it is open book. So students can go off and find some information out. But just be aware, it still is timed. So you've only got a certain amount of time.

So if it's a remote exam, you still need to know quite a bit of the information beforehand. It is an exam, as we were mentioning earlier on. But there is some time. But you just got to be careful about how much time you spend.

ISABELLA HENMAN: I totally agree with that.

KAREN FOLEY: And I think it's about being mindful of what the big picture is, and why that piece of evidence is important. I used to get so stressed about trying to remember the names of people or the years that they published particular things, and all those small bits of detail. And actually, it was the context that matters - so why I was talking about a particular study.

I remember when I was at school, I did a biology exam. And I hated biology at the time. I don't now.

CARLTON WOOD: How dare you.

KAREN FOLEY: I know, I know, how things have changed - my goodness. But at the time, I was very artsy. And so I walked up to this exam and I hadn't really done my research. And it was about whales. And it was why they beach themselves.

And it says something around the lines of, why do whale's sonars allow them to beach themselves? But I had been looking at the brain of the whales, because that interested me because whales have amazing brains. So that was a lot more interesting.

So I framed the question and said, actually, maybe it's not that they're beaching themselves. Maybe they want to die. And being intelligent beings, it may be that they feel that with global warming and other stuff going on in their lives, they might not want to live. And this is another theory.

And while I just barely scraped a pass, by framing that question and making everything really relevant to it, I think the poor soul felt so sorry for me, even though it was supposed to be about something else. And I think that the important point here is not to do that, but to think about, what's the evidence that's being used? What are the points you're wanting to make? And how can you use it to support that?

I know people are talking in the chat. And I'm going to go to HJ in just a second about resubmissions and things. And we are going to cover that. And I know it's been a challenging year for so many people. And Elaine's also going to fill us in on some of the special circumstances and things around that.

But let's just take a quick trip to you, HJ, and see how you're dealing with everybody in the chat, and if everyone's as happy as possible.

HJ: Aw, we're doing really well in the chat, as always. And there's lots of tips being shared, which I absolutely love. And I've made a note of a few of my favourites that I'm going to try on my next EMA season. So Karen says burning a lavender candle is supposed to help with your concentration. I'll give that a go.

And Celestine says, I need music to concentrate - we're big music fans in the chat - and likes to go through film soundtracks and hour long playlists. I know there's lots online of a different study beats as well. So maybe I'll give those a go.

And Sarah says, prep for one exam, I have post-it notes all over the house. And apparently her husband's very much looking forward to this exam being over. But we were talking as well - that is a very hard time. I mean, EMA, and exam time's very hard anywhere. And it's just been a hard year for everyone. And I think what we've got to keep in mind is that there's so much support out there.

Jamie will tell us how much support is out there. And just letting your student support team or tutor know is the first step. I know, myself, when I did the EMA, I was having a very hard time. And I applied for something called special circumstances, which meant because my EMA suffered, I was able to get a little boost because my quality of work before that was a little bit higher. So there's so much support out there. I know myself.

And the main thing is, whatever pass mark you get at on your module, you still completed the module. You've still done a degree. And it's still something to be really proud of. So I know in the chat we're all very positive. And we know there's lots of support out there.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And I really like Rebecca's comment as well, about think about what the worst that can happen - and she's talking about her dad's cancer diagnosis, and thinking about how she's got through such a really difficult thing. And if she can get through that, she can get through other things. I think sometimes we underestimate our own strength and resilience as well. So that's really good to hear about also.

But Varvara has a question, Carlton, I wonder if we might link to now, which is about word counts. The question is, if a question has a word count of 100 and you write 120, is that not good? Is it better than writing 80 words? So I'd like you to sort of explain to us, Carlton, please, how the word counts work, and how, as Isabella was saying beforehand, if, for example you have thousand words and you've got to include X, Y, and Z, you might sort of take a more strategic approach to proportioning those words.

CARLTON WOOD: OK, well, I'll probably answer that question in reverse fashion. So more often than not, the module teams include a word count to give you an idea about the level of detail that you need to go to. So clearly, if it's asking for 100 words, that's asking for a certain level of detail. If it's asking for a thousand words, it's asking for a greater level of detail.

If you see something where it's asking, say, for a thousand words, look in that rubric, in that sort of fluffy bit around the question, around what it's asking you to do. So if it was a thousand words you're probably looking at some kind of introduction, some kind of conclusion. I tutor on access, and we've just come, in a module I teach on, about should culling of badgers be continued? And there, students have 500 words to deal with.

And they go, oh, that's a lot to deal with. How do I go about it? So I say, well, take 10 per cent of the words for an introduction, 10 per cent of the words for a conclusion. That takes you down to, say, 400

words. And then there's actually four main points that they're asking for. So that's about 100 words per point.

And all of a sudden when you start to break it down like that, it becomes easy to manage. But also it gives you an idea of the level of detail that you need in each particular section. So if you wrote 110 rather than 100, that's neither here nor there. But if you wrote 300 words when you should only be writing 100, you're actually probably going a bit over the top.

So what happens if you go over the top or go under the word count? Well, normally you're allowed sort of 10 per cent over. So if the word count was, say, 300, you could get to 330 and you probably wouldn't be penalised. Then normally if you go over that, there's a small penalty that applies.

If you go well under, chances are - well, you won't be penalised for going under the word count as such. But you'll be penalised pretty much because you almost certainly missed some content out. It's just possible you may have written your answer very concisely and you have got all the points in there. But more often than not, you want to get somewhere close to the word count.

If you find you've gone over the word count and you know you have and you're trying to sort of trim it back, you just need to go back to the rubric again and just check, how much detail you put in certain sections. And view it section by section, because that's the easiest way of looking at how you can trim certain parts down.

KAREN FOLEY: I used to teach in STEM. And we often had these short answer questions, Carlton. And some students liked to go just over the threshold. So at that point, we had like a 10 per cent leeway, we called it. And very often, these students would undermine all their great work by just adding a little bit too much that sort of made me question the extent to which they really understood something.

So I'd argue that sometimes adding a little bit too much is not always the best sort of thing to play for, is it?

CARLTON WOOD: Well, it's true. Because also, you make it slightly harder work for the marker to go through it. And, with any of these things, you want the marker to be on your side. So if you can cover off the main points and do it concisely, then that will be very helpful towards the tutor. So yeah, you've got to sort of - just because you've got a few extra words to play with, you don't necessarily have to use them. And if you're sure you've actually written the answer and you've answered the main points of the question, just leave it at that.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Because those word counts allow for a little bit of wordiness. But ideally, if you can be clear, and confident, and concise, and show the reader what you're saying and why it's important, that's the main thing.

CARLTON WOOD: And normally as well, when the module teams are producing the question, nearly everyone these days has to do a model answer to show that the answer can be written within that word count. So if the person who's setting the question can't answer it in 300 words and that what the limit is, well, there's something wrong. More often than not, the ideal answer, if you like, is, say, perhaps 240 words out of 300. So that shows that you can, if you write very concisely, come in well under the word count and still cover all the points.

KAREN FOLEY: And likewise, going too much under the word count, not a good idea either, because it may be that you haven't gone into the level of detail. So it's normally a sort of guideline of really try to get up to 90 per cent of that word count if you possibly can. But as Isabella says - or, Isabel, sorry - in law,

they're not allowed to go over the word count. So different faculties, even different modules, have slightly different sources of guidance. So it's really important that you're clear on those.

CARLTON WOOD: And also, there's different faculties, or different parts of faculties, deploy different penalties as well. So again, it is worth checking, what the rules are for your specific module before you decide to go over or under.

KAREN FOLEY: Catherine challenged herself to always write the exact number of words. And I've seen this also, where students put 100. And then I check it. Is it 100? It is. And it's amazing.

And if it's concise, I really do appreciate the beauty of such things. But Catherine, it may be that this is one of your procrastination sources also. Let's talk about if stuff goes wrong.

Elaine, I have had a think about stuff that could go wrong. And I think the worst thing, like if you had - well, it would be that your computer would go. The electricity would break or something, and you no Wi-Fi and no way of getting in touch with people. And often we don't think that can happen. But it happened to me on a live broadcast.

So it can be something that can really scupper your plans. What's some of the stuff people should bear in mind. And actually, in all seriousness, what would they do if that happened?

ELAINE WALKER: It's a lot like planning. And it's very important to think about that as a scenario that might happen. And be prepared for it. Because when you're in that moment of something going wrong like that and you're feeling very stressed, you won't be able to think, necessarily, very clearly.

So the kind of things that are really important if things like the computer just decides to die on you, or something like that, is that you have a source of information. So I would strongly advise, for example, noting down and having a printed copy of some of the key contact points so that you don't have to have access to them electronically. It's like when my internet goes, I phone the internet service provider, who's busy telling me, oh, you can find this information on the web. No, I can't. I can't access the internet. There has to be another way.

So for example, having access, writing down the phone number to the computing help desk can be very helpful because that is a way that you can phone that number and ask for some help. The second place as well that's really helpful is to have your student support team give contact details available for their phone number written down as well, because, again, they can be an entry point to a wide source of information and help for you. So you need to find that out because each student support team has a distinct number to ring, both in England and for the different nations as well. So have that number written down and maybe their email as well for a contact point.

And don't hesitate to ring and ask for help. That's the worst thing you can do is just sit there thinking, I can't do anything. But sometimes maybe think of things that could show evidence that something's happening or not working. So maybe have your - if you've got a phone, maybe take a screenshot, or a picture, or a little video of what you're seeing in front of you so that you can record that as a piece of evidence.

But most of all, stay calm and don't panic. Have a big sign that says, please don't panic, in front of you.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. So it's good to write those things down. Because I think very often if we were particularly having a remote exam where it was time-critical on that day, it's important to have that phone number there, have a message to stay calm, and also have a message to take some sort of - not evidence, but some sort of source of what's happening so that we can try and help sort it out.

But somebody was talking in the chat a little bit earlier about how they just borderline failed their end of module assessment and now they were having to redo it again, which can be really, really hard. What's the state on resubmissions, Elaine?

ELAINE WALKER: Well, if the worst happens and you do submit your exam or your EMA and it doesn't quite meet the right standard, that's an academic decision. But you do get a chance to resubmit or resit the exam. Now, typically for the June exams and EMAs that are coming up now, the point in time of doing that will be at the very beginning of September. So you'll have a short period of time once you've had your result at the end of July to prepare for that resubmission or resit exam at the beginning of September. If it's not convenient, we can postpone it ahead to the next time. But if you can do it then, you should get your result in time to start your next module as planned, provided you passed and everything, in October. So that's the procedure that's in place there. And again, you can always phone us and contact us and ask us to help and support.

KAREN FOLEY: And Lorraine says, in South Africa - I was born in South Africa, so I'm very familiar with this - used to always plan ahead, as the power goes down regularly. So you can't always bank on Wi-Fi, which I think is really important. If you are in that situation, it's likely that may happen and then you need that sort of contingency there. What about special circumstances?

HJ mentioned this a little bit earlier, Elaine. And some people are saying they've had really challenging years with losing loved ones to COVID and various other things that have obviously affected us during the pandemic. So tell us about special circumstances, what students may need to do, and what they apply to.

ELAINE WALKER: One of the things is, I think a lot of students think that they might have been telling us things over the year and that's all in the student record, and that will all be taken into account. No. No, it won't. This is a separate - the assessment is looked at by the module results panel. And they don't get to see any of that.

What they can get to see is a special circumstances form that you complete to say, this happened to me. Now, you can do the special circumstances form because perhaps there were some incidents earlier in the year that affected the TMAs that you were submitting. Perhaps it is just all about the exam or EMA and what happened around that time in the run up to that exam or EMA.

The special circumstances form is your voice at that module results panel. But think about it as a question in an exam. Do think about it like that because you need to be, again, concise and clear. There's no point in doing a big, oh, this happened, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

The exam module results panel are going to see a lot of these. And they need to be able to see very quickly what it was. So they need to know two things, what happened and when it happened, but also what the impact was.

So there's no point in saying something awful like, I was in a car crash, and just leave it at that. You need to say, I was in a car crash. I was injured. That affected my study around TMAs 4 and 5, and the lead up into the exam.

So you're saying clearly what happened, and say when it happened, and what the impact was. You don't have to provide any evidence because of special rules around COVID. If you have got some evidence to back it up, then please do feel free to submit that as well. But if you can't get a hold of evidence, that's OK. But that is your voice. So you use it because you are the only person that knows how that impacted you and your study.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, Luke has a question about whether or not special circumstances need to be submitted for each TMA. Or, is it just at the end of the module?

ELAINE WALKER: You can just submit one special circumstance that deals with the TMA. Some students send them in each time it happens. But you can just submit one. I think it's up to about the - oh, there's a time limit. I've forgotten now what it is - but so many days after the end of the last piece of assessment to send it in by.

The rules are there in that special circumstances form that you put on the screen before. But you could just do it once and think about what you're submitting is fine.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And then I wonder if we might also look at resubmissions. Isabella, you've been marking in - well, not marking, but doing work with students in STEM. And very often they may have to resubmit a final piece of module assessment. And one of our students here today is doing that. Can you talk a little bit about how they could work through their feedback for that and basically take advantage of some of the support that they would get as part of that resubmission process?

ISABELLA HENMAN: Yeah so I've been a resit tutor on a number of different modules. And I'm going to do it again this year. And I think the key thing to bear in mind is, don't make the same mistakes, but do keep up what worked. So you need to check back to your marks.

Now, if it's an exam or an EMA, you wouldn't necessarily have got as detailed feedback as you would in a TMA, but you would have - for instance, you've got 5 questions. It might say, question 1, you got between 50 and 65 per cent. Question 2, you got between 15 and 30. So you look at that, and you go, well, OK, question 2 is where I need to focus my attention because I didn't do very well. Now, you might already have known that because you might have - during the process, you might thought, this was really hard. Now, you have to think strategically, again, based on the amount of time you've got. Don't get yourself worked up by focusing on the things that are really hard to the detriment of everything else. But don't ignore something that you know that you didn't do very well on because you didn't actually do it in the first place.

Sometimes I get students who go, for whatever reason, well, I've skipped that because I didn't do it at the time. And if it has an ongoing effect, then you might have to go back and do it again. But you do get - it depends on the module. Sometimes you might get a one-to-one support session with a tutor where you'll get to talk through your strategy and think about, as I've just said, which bits did you do well at, to make sure you keep doing it.

And I can't emphasise that enough because I think students often only focus on the bits that they don't do well, which means that they don't remember to keep things up that they did do well. So you could have a one-to-one support session. There may be tutorials that are run for a number of students. Make sure you come prepared. So things like specimen exam papers, things like past exam papers, things like past feedback, make sure you look at it and know what you need to do.

The frustrating thing sometimes when I'm trying to support students is I'll go to them and say, right, have you looked at the paper? No. OK, well if you don't even know what you need to do - well, I didn't look last time and I just had a go. And it doesn't happen often, but it does happen enough to worry me.

You can plan. Carlton was talking at the start about planning. If you don't plan and you don't know what you need to do, you don't know whether you've done it. And it is all a learning process. And there's lots of things to do.

There is support, but we can't tell you the information. We can't convey that. I can't turn around go, well, Carlton, today you're going to learn this module. Equally, you can't do the same to me. I can't say, Elaine, well, OK, today, zoop. It's coming to you. You can't do the same thing.

You do have to learn for yourself. But you're learning for a reason. You're learning because you want to learn. You're adults. You're learning, you're choosing.

But thinking about applying that learning and going back to the start, thinking about what actually is involved - if you're resitting, you've had a look at it previously, apart from in some cases where it was genuinely submitting essentially a blank piece of paper to entitle you to resit. But look at it. Look at all the guidance there.

The module teams provide it. You may have had tutor group tutorials, you may have had cluster tutorials, you may have had module tutorials, which actually explained for people the first time around. Make use of them. Don't just go, oh, it will be OK. I'm resitting. I'll automatically do better.

I know in the past when I haven't done well and I've come to things again, I've had to think, right, OK, I know I don't like this. And I've got this negative feeling because I didn't do well. But I've got to think, what do I have to do to get through this?

I remember failing a violin exam. And I was always really worried in the future. And I was like, I don't want to do these again. OK, right.

Try and get away from that. Try and think, OK, what can I do? What can I control?

I can control certain bits. You can't control everything. But you can control enough for your learning journey, and hopefully to resit successfully this time.

KAREN FOLEY: Mm, brilliant. Stephanie's got a lovely quote, which is, if you fail to prepare, you prepare to fail. And one of the other things we liked as a group, I think, was failure's the first attempt at learning. But yeah, it's something we're all terrified of. But needless to say, focusing can really prevent that from happening.

Carlton, I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about discretionary postponement. It is an option for students. And some students can just get so terrified of something that they think, I can't physically do this right now. And from my own experience of students where they've maybe deferred an exam just because they've been so stressed, they tend to sort of step away from that module, move on to another one, and it can be really hard to sort of get back in the thick of what's been going on throughout that year. So can you tell us about what students' options may be for discretionary postponement if it's something they want to look at.

CARLTON WOOD: Yeah, so discretionary postponement sounds very grand and very complicated, doesn't it? But basically, yeah, it's an opportunity for students to postpone their exam or their EMA if their circumstances warrant it. We were just talking earlier on about the SST involvement. And it's really important that if you're thinking of going down that route, that you choose the opportunity to speak to someone from the SST because there's a certain process that you have to go through.

You can have a discretionary postponement. Or you can choose to go for a discretionary postponement up to one day after having seen the exam. If you start the exam, then you can't take discretionary postponement. So it's got to be where you haven't actually submitted anything. And you can seek to take discretion postponement. And normally it means you can postpone it to the next opportunity. Elaine could probably possibly give a few more details on how it actually works at a SST level.



ELAINE WALKER: Yeah, the important thing is that the discretionary postponement is there. Again, you don't need to have evidence because of COVID. It's meant to be there as an emergency thing. So if on the morning of an exam you wake up with a very bad migraine and think, oh, I can't get through it. If you even open up the exam, if it's one of the very short time ones, and you think, no, this is getting bad, as long as you haven't submitted anything, then you can apply for discretionary postponement. That's the critical part. And then -

CARLTON WOOD: That's the key thing, isn't Elaine?

ELAINE WALKER: Yeah.

CARLTON WOOD: Don't submit something. Because if you submit something, that counts as a go, if you like. And you can't take a discretionary postponement. And at that point, is really important that you talk to the SST.

ELAINE WALKER: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Now, we've got Dominic reading his tutor's comments lots, which I think is a very, very good strategy. And Charlotte has a question about whether the final EMA - so, end of module assignment - is marked by your tutor or by somebody different, because there can be different things going on. And even so, does that matter? Carlton, I wonder if you can fill us in on that.

CARLTON WOOD: Well, simple answer, it could be marked by your tutor, but almost certainly not. So there's normally a selected team of people mark the EMAs. They're typically experienced tutors. Or it may be, if the numbers are relatively small, it's just the module team that mark. So don't assume that it is your tutor.

So therefore, as in answering any question, make sure you put all the detail down. Don't think, oh well, my tutor knows I know this, so I'm not going to put it down. That's a bad idea. So, yeah, just assume that it isn't your tutor and give enough information so the marker can allocate you the credit you deserve.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Right, let's take a quick trip to the hot desk. HJ, I bet your fingers are burning. Have we answered everyone's questions? Is there anything else we need to put to our panel? Oh, you're on mute.

HJ: Most of them -

KAREN FOLEY: There we are.

HJ: Oh, am I on mute again?

KAREN FOLEY: I missed the bit at first. I warned you about that.

HJ: I know. I must get better. I need to make notes to remind myself.

KAREN FOLEY: You've got a lot going on.

HJ: But no, we've done really well with answering the questions. And Jamie and Tal have been absolutely fantastic in helping us get our answers and knowing where to go for help as well, which is fantastic. And I think that's the main thing that we've learned today is that there's always help when we need it. And there's always someone to answer our questions. Because there was so much going on in the chat today, if unfortunately we did miss your question or there's something you wanted to ask, just email us, [studenthub@open.ac.uk](mailto:studenthub@open.ac.uk), and we'll be happy to get back to you. And your tutor, your student support team, and even the computing help desk, they're all there for different reasons and there to support you as well.

So definitely ask for help. But I've definitely learned a lot myself, and got a lot of good tips out of today as well. I agree with Dominic, he said a while back that cat videos are therapy, not procrastination. So I'm

gonna take that to heart. That's going to be my new motto. And I agree with Jacqueline as well that we're all going off to Prague after this, I think.

KAREN FOLEY: And I'm going to try the Amazon Music for pets, which I think sounds lovely at my - lull my dogs, who have been very well behaved incidentally today, mainly because they've been bribed. And I think their tummies are so bloated they're falling asleep. But nonetheless, it's a triumph. So yeah, I'm going to be taking that away from today's session as well. Thank you, HJ.

Well, it's time to wrap up for today. And I think we've learned lots and lots of different things. And the key thing I think is that it can be really scary, especially if you've got an exam coming up. It can be hard to think, how am I going to showcase a year's worth of work in a final piece of assessment?

But the thing is that the challenging, and that's challenging for a reason. And also, while it can be scary and you might think you'll fail, try if you possibly can not to bottle it. Be confident with your answers. If you can submit that exam, do, because otherwise you're just going to have to go back and relearn it all again anyway.

But if things do genuinely happen that mean that you can't, I hope that you've seen from both Jamie and Leanne - sorry, not Leanne even - Elaine, that there were so many different things the student support team can do. So make sure you've got that number down. You've got the computing help desk down if you need any computing help or support on the day. You take evidence that's there. And you remember that we all, including your tutor, want you to succeed in this journey. And then you can have a lovely break over the summer.

Oh, Luke says he's off to clean his neighbour's car. Well, Luke, that wasn't really the objective that we wanted to convey today. You're just going back to doing the same behaviour. Still, I bet your neighbour's very pleased. And I hope that you're being paid for it.

Oh, Clara has one question, actually, we haven't covered, which is can we opt, Elaine, for a discretionary postponement for the EMA as well?

ELAINE WALKER: Yes. Yes, you can is the very simple answer to that. You can simply apply. All the details are there. And you can apply for a discretionary postponement and it will get rolled forward to the next available opportunity.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Well, thank you very much. Thank you, Carlton. Thank you, Isabella. Thank you, Elaine.

As I mentioned earlier, we have some more Student Hub Live workshops coming up. You can check those out on the Student Hub Live website. We have preparing for your best EMA on the 12th of May at 12:00. And we have a creative note taking workshop, which is for everybody on the 17th of May. And then we have a preparation for exams, which will be remote on the 18th of May.

So you can book your tickets. Spaces are limited. So please make sure that you get one if you'd like to attend.

They are in Adobe Connect, a different interface to what we've had today, but still nonetheless very chatty, filled with lots of different information, where we'll be taking a slightly more considered approach to each of those and thinking about the planning and preparation on the day. As with today, you can ask all the questions that you've got there as well, but most importantly, another chance to connect with other wonderful OU students and our student community. So I hope that you can make it to those events.

We also have a mailing list, which we send information about events, as well as our blog and various other things that we're involved with. So put your email on that, also on the Student Hub Live website.

And then you can be the first to find out what's happening. We have an exciting programme of loads of events throughout the year. And gearing up to next module start, which I know will be first and foremost on a lot of your minds, we'll be helping you get in the best shape possible with some workshops as well. So they'll be coming up in September. But as I say, we have a whole calendar of events throughout the whole year. So make sure that you can get involved with those too. Right, that's all.

I'm going to go and make some lunch now. And I hope you all are going to go and do something thoroughly worthwhile. I hope that you're feeling a lot more supported and secure about your forthcoming assessment. And I do wish you all the very best luck. Thank you, everyone, for coming along today and see you again very soon. Bye for now.