

Step 1 Am I ready to study in English?

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Most people are familiar with the idea that styles of writing within an academic context are influenced by subject area – writing a scientific report involves different technical language and a different sort of presentation to writing for an Arts subject, and even students who are educated in the United Kingdom and whose first language is English often find the switch between disciplines difficult at first. In addition, language, culture and educational background also influence your writing in English, even in an academic context. For example, not all cultural traditions teach that you should announce your topic directly in an introduction, or use your conclusion to merely restate what has gone before. Other differences include the extent to which figures of speech such as metaphor are used.

This means that even if you have studied at degree level before, studying in a second or additional language may present extra challenges for you and you may find that studying takes longer than expected.

Here are comments that some students starting university study have made; maybe you will identify with one of them:

- I was born in Myanmar so I speak Burmese, but at home I speak a dialect of Kachin. So English is a third language for me. I hope to go to university when I matriculate this year. I want to study chemistry but the subject I study will depend on my matriculation marks. I hope this course will help me understand science in English better, so I am more prepared.
- I am a graduate from Yangon University of Distance Education but am finding it hard to get a job. I think one reason is that I am ok at reading English, but I'm not good at writing English because at school we focused on reading English. I think I need to learn more about writing English so that I have a better vocabulary and am more confident. This will improve my job prospects I think.
- I am a second year university student. I'm studying Geography at Yadanabon University. Although the textbooks we use are written in English, I rely on the Burmese summaries and my teacher who teaches in both languages. I do not feel very confident about studying in English at this level.

Whatever your background in English, we hope that when you have worked through this course you will be in a better position to make a choice about the suitability of higher education study for you at the moment.

The texts we ask you to read and work on are taken from Open University course materials typical of the sort of material that you would meet whilst studying at undergraduate level in the United Kingdom. A distinctive feature in studying with The Open University is that all our courses are taught via 'supported open learning', using a mixture of media such as specially written texts, videos, DVDs, CD-ROMs and online resources. If you choose to take an Open University course, you will be studying on your own from home although you will have support and guidance from a tutor. All Open University courses are written in English, and you are expected to be able to read and understand the course material as well as write assignments that are likely to include reports and essays. You may also have an exam, project or assessment at the end of the course. While other educational institutions may have more face-to-face contact there is still a strong focus on working with written materials, so you may find this course useful wherever you intend to study.

All the examples in the course are taken from courses equivalent to first-year undergraduate study. Each section consists of one or more self-assessment tasks to work through on your own, followed by feedback and suggestions on how you can work to improve your skills. Do take time to work through the whole course, as each section engages with different types of linguistic competence relevant for studying in English at higher education level. At the end of the course there is a grid which allows you to take an overview of how you feel you got on with each task in turn. It is a good idea to copy the grid and fill in the relevant parts as you go along, after you have completed each task. The final section in this course looks at 'next steps' and includes reference to useful sources of information and support to develop your learning skills.

This course won't give you all the answers in deciding what you are going to do; your English skills are one factor along with your previous educational experience and how long it is since you last studied. However, we hope that working through this course and reflecting on the exercises will help you to make better use of information, advice and guidance that is available.

Now go to [Step 2 What sort of English do I need to be able to study at higher education level?](#)