Contents

Introduction viii

1 Seminars, Study Workshops and Tutorials 1
   Seminar presentations 2
   Tutorials 3
   How to progress 5

2 Attending Lectures 6
   Preparing for lectures 7
   Making lecture notes 8
   After the lecture 12
   How to progress 14

3 Reading Skills and Note Taking 15
   Types of texts 16
   Tips for choosing books 19
   Tips for choosing internet texts 20
   Tips on the honey bee method 21
   A reading notebook 26
   How to progress 27

4 Planning 29
   A word of warning 29
   Are you a natural planner? 30
   Know the best planning method for each task 30
   Make a six-point plan before you get confused 31
   The spider chart 32
   The flow chart 34
   The brainstorm 35
   The mind map 36
   Return to your six-point plan 38
   Add the detail 38
   How to progress 40
# Contents

## 5 Writing Essays
- Knowing what you are being asked to do 41
- Making a plan 41
- Beginning to write 48
- Paragraphs, signposting and persuasion 50
- How to progress 57

## 6 Presentations
- Presentation techniques 60
- Preparing your presentation 63
- Example presentation 65
- How to progress 70

## 7 Writing Reports
- Report layout 71
- Decimal notation 74
- How to progress 75

## 8 Writing a Dissertation
- Supervision 77
- Timing 78
- Word count 79
- Title 79
- Openings and endings 79
- Motivation 80
- Subject matter 80
- Planning 82
- Research and writing 84
- How to progress 88

## 9 Exams and Revision
- Timing 89
- Planning 89
- Managing the material 90
- Preparing 91
- In the exam 92
- How to progress 94

## 10 Personal Development
- REAL learning 96
- How to progress 102
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11 Organising Your Time</th>
<th>103</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personalised timetable</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing your timetable</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making time</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking control</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to progress</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12 Sorting Out Your Money</th>
<th>109</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reducing your running costs whilst you study</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earning money</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorting out financial problems</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to progress</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13 Help and Support</th>
<th>115</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For your help</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For you</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For your studying</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider support</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to progress</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>14 Embracing Change</th>
<th>123</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The new you</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning for change</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing your career</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career management action plan</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum vitae</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Last Thoughts             | 137 |

Index 138
Index

access to learning fund 113
brainstorm 35–6
brainstorming, online 35–6
bursaries 109
career management action plan 131–2
career management modules 130
career planning 129–36
Careers Advisory Service 109, 117, 130, 131, 132, 133
change, embracing 123–36
planning for 125–8
tracking 123–5
chaplaincy 117
checking your work 85–8
checklists
Checklist 1: Tutorials 5
Checklist 2: Lectures 13
Checklist 3: Note taking 24
Checklist 4: Presentations: preparation 64
Checklist 5: Presentations: rehearsals 69
Checklist 6: Time management 104
Checklist 7: Managing your budget 111
Checklist 8: Earning money 112
Checklist 9: Personal development 124
Checklist 10: Rating your course 126
Checklist 11: Evaluating your study 127
classes 1
dissertation 77–88
example 80–3
motivation 80
opening and ending 79
planning 82–3
supervision 77–8
timing 78–9
title 79
word count 79
dyslexia, organisational 29–30
eye questions 42
essays 41–57
examinations 89–94
preparation 91
technique 92–4
examinations, seen 91
finance 109–14
flow chart 34–5
hardship fund 113
help and support 115–22
honey bee method 21–6
internet use 20–1
IT services 119
learning sessions 1
lecture notebook 12
lectures 6–14
library see resource centre
library serendipity 19
mature students’ groups 117–18
medical centre 115
mind map 36–8
money, see finance
paragraphs 50
peer review 20
personal development 95–102, 123–36
personal development log 95–6
personal tutor 117
personalised timetable, see timetable: personalised
persuasive writing 53–6
plagiarism 120

decimal notation, see Reports: decimal notation
departmental support groups 118
discussion groups 1
dissertation 77–88
evidence 80–3
motivation 80
opening and ending 79
Index

planning 29–40, 41–51
presentations 58–70
body language 62–3
breathing 60–1
dissertation 59
example 65–8
giving results 58–9
groups 64
nerves 60
preparing 63–70
professional 59
rehearsals 68
research 58
silence 61
speed of speech 61
reading lists 15–16
reading notebook 26–7
REAL learning 96–102
referencing 20, 23
reflective learning 96–102
report layout 71–4
reports 71–6
decimal notation 74–5
research notebook 84
resource centre 120
revision 36, 89–94
planning 89–90
timing 89
revision groups 119
scholarships 109
seminar presentations 2
seminars 1–3
signposting 50–4
spider chart 32–4, 45, 49, 66, 83
studentships 109
study weekends 6
study workshops 1
summer schools 6
texts: choosing books 19
texts: type of 16–18
time management 103–8
timetable: personalised 78, 103–8
tutorials 1, 3–4
writer’s block 48
Introduction

As a reader of this book you are probably either already a mature student or will soon be entering a course of study as a mature student. This means, of course, that you are already successful in several ways. You have successfully reached a point in your life where you are able to become a mature student, you have succeeded in finding a course of study that suits your needs, and, in buying this book, you have shown your determination to capitalise on this position and succeed as a mature student.

Statistically, you are already in an enviable position: mature students tend to excel in their chosen courses, and there are many reasons for this. They are generally more focused than their younger counterparts and can use their life experience within their study. If all of this seems a bit too good to be true, it is also worth bearing in mind that some mature students struggle with some aspects of studying, and even if they succeed in the end, this struggle can make the journey far harder than it needs to be – and that is why this book has been written. It is designed to help you to identify your strengths as a student (and there will be plenty of these, even if they do not all spring to your mind immediately) and to make best use of them. If you have weaknesses (and all students do, in one way or another) then these too will be explored and practical suggestions made as to how you can overcome or eradicate them.

Of course, there is no ‘typical’ mature student: you might be in your early twenties or have recently retired; you perhaps have a young family or you may be living alone; you might be dovetailing paid work and online or part-time study or be a full-time student. Your situation in life is as unique as you are, but you will have some things in common with other mature students, however different their lives seem at first glance.

Why this book?

At this point you might be wondering why this particular book is the best guide for you. If all students have some weakness, why do you need a guide specifically aimed at mature students? Beyond the practical aspects of such a guide – the examples in this book, for example, will more nearly fit your circumstances than those in a guide for less experienced students – it is also important for you to focus on your needs and strengths in a way that makes more sense to mature students. Younger students, fresh out of school or college, for example, are unlikely to need much help with understanding the principles of coursework, as they will have lived and breathed coursework for several years already. A mature student might be far less familiar with this aspect of education. What a younger student is likely to need, though, is a lot of help with basic time
management, whereas a mature student’s life experience usually makes this less of an issue. This book does give guidance on time management, but in a way that makes most sense to those students who are already used to juggling life.

Why this author?

I was myself a mature student when I first began to study. From A levels, through professional training courses, to a degree and finally a doctorate, I managed the demands of a working life, studying and a family. And I did it badly – for some of the time. Over the last ten years I have taught undergraduates of all ages and have devised and delivered professional development courses, including distance and e-learning courses; I have found out during that time that I was not alone in this. I wasted a lot of my time reinventing the wheel, trying to do things in new ‘student’ ways that I could perfectly happily – and far more easily – have done in my old ways. I worried about the wrong things, at the wrong times, and generally made life hard for myself; and I have seen countless mature students do exactly the same thing over the years.

So, that is what this guide is all about: helping you to avoid the pitfalls, encouraging you to use your talents, and guiding you through your course of study in the most effective way, to make it an enjoyable, and far more successful, experience.

You are not alone . . .

Even on a course with a relatively high number of mature students, it is all too easy to feel alone, as if you are the only student to be facing your particular problems, or to be negotiating your particular hurdles. Although you try to convince yourself that others must be struggling in similar ways, it can be difficult to share your concerns with them, especially if you are studying on a course where you are outnumbered by younger students. As your course progresses you will find that the gap between mature and younger students is far less wide than you might have supposed. One of the joys of studying is discovering how shared interests break down barriers between people, but this may not be enough to help you when you are staring at a problem and feel unable to solve it alone.

The sense of isolation that this feeling brings with it is damaging, not only to you as a person, but also to the progress of your studying, but the sections in this book will show you that the challenges you face are quite usual in your circumstances. By seeing that you are not alone, I hope you will gain a stronger sense of yourself, your goals and your talents.

Feeling part of a mature students’ community, which is spread throughout all areas of study and around the world, is a crucial step in achieving success. Drawing on the experience of others, and using the techniques that they have found effective, you will save yourself time and trouble, which will leave you more space in life to enjoy your success.
How this book can help

You will probably use this book in several ways. You might be in a position, right now, to read the guide from cover to cover, which I hope you would find enjoyable. It is more likely that you will dip into it over the coming weeks and months. Whichever way you use it, I hope it is a book you will return to again and again as your course progresses.

With this in mind, the guide has been designed to offer you advice in several different ways. The text is deliberately broken up into manageable chunks of information: these chunks of information are intended to be used in various ways. The guide is divided into sections which can be used to give you an overview of an area or as a practical source of support. There are checklists to tick, tables to complete, charts to fill out – in short, this is a doing book as much as it is a reading book. It will also become a completely personalised book, too, allowing you to look back on the notes you made and the responses you gave earlier in your course, showing you how far you have come. The checklists may also be downloaded free from the following website, which will allow you to have as many copies as you like: www.skills4study.com.

If you feel confident in one area, you might just read the overview of that section so as to confirm what you know already. In other areas you will spend longer working through the exercises, but never too long: none of the exercises are too time consuming, so they will not take you from your studies for long. You are likely to read some sections in planning for a specific event, such as a presentation or an exam. In this case, you will find the checklists particularly useful, especially when you are at the stage of last-minute preparations.

Other areas will be useful to you as aids in the general development of your proficiency as a student. The step-by-step guides are designed to take you as easily as possible through key aspects of study skills, without the need to wade through yards of jargon or irrelevant theory; highlighted words will alert you to the key point of a section. After the general overview in each section, the exercises are designed to help you put the theory into practice. After most of the exercises there is a more detailed explanation, which you will only need as a support to that exercise.

Sometimes, of course, we all get stuck, knowing that we need some help but finding it difficult to work out just what guidance we need. This problem is particularly acute for mature students, who might be unfamiliar with some of the learning situations they face. For this reason, there is a list of suggestions at the end of each section as to where you might go next in order to keep developing your skills.

Whichever type of learner you are . . .

You might be any type of student – you could be involved in an e-learning course, you could be a part- or full-time student, you could be undertaking a distance learning course or be staggering your learning over many months or years. Luckily, this book will be relevant to you whichever form your study takes. The exercises are drawn from many
methods of study, and there is a good reason for this. Although you might feel very different from a student who is studying on a course that is structured differently from your own, the fundamental skills you will both need for success will be similar – in many cases, they will be identical. There are plenty of academic-sounding names for these skills, but in essence they are related to your everyday experience as a student; they are the fundamental building blocks of your success, and that is what this guide is all about.