

MAKING THE MOST OF GLOBALLY CONNECTED LEARNING: A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

The Heriot-Watt approach, **Globally Connected Learning** is founded on a commitment to student partnership. That means you are encouraged to take responsibility for your own learning, to actively participate in the learning opportunities open to you and to engage with the global Heriot-Watt community. You will be supported to do this throughout your studies.

Globally Connected Learning is based on a blend of online and on-campus learning for all students. The specific balance of learning on individual courses will depend on the particular subjects you are studying and the activities and resources your course team have designed to help you engage effectively with your studies.

In this guide we highlight how you can structure your time and plan your studies to make the most of the opportunities presented by Globally Connected Learning.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR STUDY TIME

Your study will be a combination of live and structured asynchronous activities, as well as work that you undertake on your own or with a group, with wrap-around support from your course team to help you plan your studies. The amount of study time in a course is linked to the number of academic credits for the course, one credit equals approximately 10 hours of study. This means if you are studying a 15-credit course, you can expect to study 150 hours over the duration of that course. If you are studying your degree full-time this usually means about 35 hours of study per week. You should take this into account when planning any other activities.

It is important to look ahead to each week of study and plan how you can most effectively use your time. This will include time to work through the material and activities as well as space to think and reflect on your learning.

- **Live sessions:** If you are studying a campus-based course live sessions will be held on campus, if you are studying an online course they will be held online. Wherever they are held it is your responsibility to ensure that you prepare for and attend sessions as they are a key means to support your learning. Live sessions are timetabled each week. Live sessions include whole class sessions e.g. lectures or active learning, seminars, workshops, tutorials, labs etc. It is important to you do any preparatory work identified by the course team to ensure you really make the most of the live sessions on offer.
- **Structured asynchronous study:** Your course team will set activities and study which you should do in your own time. This is called asynchronous study. The course team may give you an indication of when to undertake this study or you may need to plan your study time yourself.
- **Self-study:** This is the time you spend researching, thinking and reflecting on your studies. You can do this at any time. Self-study and reflection time will help develop and deepen your disciplinary understanding and skills.

- **Group work:** You may be asked to collaborate with others in your course. This may require you to interact live or to work asynchronously in your group. Whichever way you are collaborating, it is important to make sure that everyone in the group is included and plays a part in the group work.

You may find it useful to create a study timetable for yourself, mapping out live sessions and other activities, as well as allocating breaks, travel and social time. Support for time management and other study skills is available on the [Skills Hub](#) or from the Effective Learning Advisors.

GETTING THE MOST FROM GCL: COMBINING LIVE AND ASYNCHRONOUS STUDY

To get the most from GCL, preparation is key. It can be helpful to use the live sessions (on-campus or online depending on your course) as a focal point of study and then consider what you need to do to make the most of your study time:



Is it essential to schedule time to look at preparatory material and activities, take notes and review learning, as well as taking part in the timetabled sessions. Have a look at your timetable and identify times when you can do the pre- and post-session study.

1

BE PREPARED BEFORE A LIVE SESSION

Check what your lecturer has signposted as preparation, for example you may be asked to watch a video, read material from an e-textbook or a journal article, or listen to a podcast. You may also be asked to go to the discussion board in your course site and answer questions, or share your initial thoughts on a topic, prior to a live session. Schedule enough time to be able to review the material, take notes and discuss it with your classmates. And then do it. This preparatory work is the most important step as it familiarises you with the material you will be exploring in the live session. Don't skimp on this stage.

Look for directions to help you with preparation for the live session:

- What material / activity should I review before the live session?
- Has the lecturer given me specific points to look out for while I watch / listen / read / participate?
- Has the lecturer asked me to answer specific questions related to the material?
- Have I been asked to prepare anything in a specific format?
- Have I been asked to share answers or examples in a specific place (in an Office 365 document, a discussion board, or Teams) before the session?

Preparation before a session familiarises you with the topic that is coming up in the live session. It also contributes to your wider understanding of the course. It may be revision for you, or it may be new material. Either way, if you have engaged with it and tried to understand it before the session, you are in a better position to take part in the live session.

2

BE PREPARED DURING A SESSION

The purpose of the live session is not simply for you to listen to the lecturer talk; you've already done the equivalent of that when you prepared (Stage 1). What is important now is that you apply what you have read / watched / listened to, because the best way of learning is by doing. During a live session it is likely that your lecturer will have activities for you to do to help consolidate and extend your learning. These activities will be easier if you have done the preparation before the session.

What might you experience in a live session?

- Asking or answering a question.
- Discussing and analysing a topic or issue.
- Listening to presentations by the lecturer or by other students.
- Answering a poll question – this may be a simple yes / no or true / false question, a multiple-choice question, or a more complex question requiring a longer answer.
- Sharing your reasoning and answer(s) to a question, issue or problem e.g. demonstrating your working for a maths problem, explaining your logic in a debate etc.
- Working with other students in groups – for example, this might be to discuss a topic or to collaboratively produce an output.

3

BE PREPARED AFTER A SESSION

After a live session, take time to consolidate and extend your learning. Review the material, activities and your notes from the live session, continue with any pre-session study that you have not yet completed and undertake any post-session activities your lecturer may have organised.

ENGAGING WITH THE GLOBAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

Globally Connected Learning offers you the opportunity to connect across the global Heriot-Watt community through our on-campus and online learning spaces.

In your course context you can connect with other learners before, during and after live sessions. You can also connect via course discussion boards, using them not just as a space for discussion of course themes but also a place to connect with your class community. You might like to set up a study group or find a study buddy either within your course or programme or within your other social groups, such as those you share accommodation with. Even if you're not studying the same subject, studying together can help you to stay motivated. There are lots of spaces you can hold study

groups on campus or you can meet online using University online or other communication tools. Talking to other students might seem a bit daunting at first, but informal chat before and after a class can help to make connections, as can speaking up in class or during group work.

If you're working collaboratively, make sure you agree clear ways of working. If your group is across multiple time zones it might be best to work asynchronously, by email, text, shared document or discussion board, rather than trying to meet in person. If you prefer to meet live, consider whether it's best for the group to meet in the online or on-campus learning spaces, or you may choose to make use of both.

ENGAGING IN ACTIVE LEARNING

A key aspect of Globally Connected Learning is that you have the opportunity to engage in active learning. Active learning is when you participate in meaningful activities, think about those activities, and apply knowledge to new contexts to help you gain a deeper understanding of your subject. This contrasts with passive learning where you sit and simply listen or watch a lecture / recording or read material without thinking about it.

Active learning may require you to undertake activities prior to participating in live sessions. Often these activities will be reading, watching or listening to material to provide you with core information on a topic. You will then actively engage with the topic during the live session e.g. through discussion or debate, working together to solve problems or other application of the knowledge. The balance of activities will vary between classes. Make sure that you do the advance preparation and that you fully participate during live sessions so that you get the most from your studies. Remember to undertake any further activities after a live session and to reflect on each week of learning. Participating in active learning has been shown to provide deeper understanding of a subject and longer-term ability to recall and apply information.

MAKING THE MOST OF OUR LEARNING SPACES

Any space can be a learning space provided that it supports you to think about and apply your learning. Heriot-Watt campuses have a range of formal and informal learning spaces both on-campus and online. Formal learning spaces are the classrooms, labs, studios and other spaces used for formal teaching. Any space which is not a formal space scheduled for teaching is an informal learning space.

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MAKING THE MOST OF CAMPUS LEARNING SPACES

Formal learning spaces on campus include lecture theatres, labs, studios and classrooms. Campus informal learning spaces include the learning commons, cafés, the library and group study rooms, so are the corridors, the grounds, the gym and even the public transport you might have arrived on.

Get to know your campus learning spaces and which work best for your study habits. You may find it particularly use to get to know the library as this is a key source of support for your studies.

TOP TIPS FOR USING CAMPUS SPACES

- Make sure the space is appropriate for the learning you want to do e.g. a quiet space for thinking or reflection, if you are working in a chatty group a spacious place that doesn't mind some noise is probably best, if you're using mobile devices check that you've access to a power supply.
- Remember to check that the space you plan to use is available (especially if it is also used for other activities) and that it has access to everything you need.
- Make yourself comfortable in the space e.g. have access to your study resources, refreshments etc.

MAKING THE MOST OF ONLINE LEARNING SPACES

Formal learning spaces online include webinar platforms and discussion boards, however these can also provide informal learning spaces e.g. in breakout rooms or side discussions.

Get to know your online learning spaces, particularly your course site on Canvas as this will guide you through your studies. It is also useful to familiarise yourself with the online library as this is a key means to access resources if you are not on campus or if it is outside of on-campus library opening hours.

TOP TIPS FOR USING ONLINE LEARNING SPACES

- Use the technology that is appropriate to your needs e.g. video/audio chat for discussion, slides for presentations, spreadsheets for data.
- Make sure everyone has access to the space and can use it e.g. don't pick a platform that only some people are familiar with or has high connectivity requirements if not everyone has good connection.
- Make yourself comfortable both in the online space but also wherever you are accessing it from e.g. have access to your study resources, refreshments etc.

EXPLORING TOOLS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Your course may use a variety of tools to support your study online. Some examples of tools which support you to engage with the course and your classmates are explained below.

POLLING AND QUIZZES

You may be invited to participate in polls or quizzes during live sessions on-campus or online, or asynchronously via your course site on Canvas. These provide opportunities for you to test your understanding of the topics and receive feedback on this either individually or as a group. Don't be afraid to participate – these activities are not about knowing the right answer first time, they are here to help you think about your subject and develop your understanding through feedback and discussion.

DISCUSSION BOARDS

Discussion boards in your course site on Canvas are a really useful way to communicate and provide a way for you to connect with your global classmates and the course team. You may be directed to a discussion board before or after a live session (or sometimes the discussion board is part of the live

session). Examples of how discussion boards are used include:

- Answering a question related to the session in a discussion forum
- Collaborating with students in a discussion forum
- Commenting on student answers in a forum
- Asking questions in a Q&A forum.

COLLABORATION TOOLS

Office 365 enables you to collaborate on any documents with others in Heriot-Watt. You might be asked to do this in pairs, small groups or even as a whole class. Collaborative documents might be used to provide you with worksheets or other activities, or to undertake groupwork e.g. a shared report or presentation. Some collaborations might already be set up for you in your course site in Canvas, others you might have to create yourself using Office 365.

MAKING THE MOST OF DISCUSSION BOARDS

Discussion boards can help you make sense of topics you are learning and are a useful repository of work done in a course. You can record your thoughts, ask questions, and answer other learners' questions. You can also keep in touch with classmates, and your tutors and lecturers. Discussion boards are useful for many reasons.

Time to think

Discussion boards are really helpful when you need time to think about your answer, for example to compose what you are going to say to check facts or calculations, before you post. You may need extra time if, for example, English is not your first language or you are new to the subject matter. Working on discussion boards gives you a chance to think about what you are going to say before you post your message.

Range of opinions

Depending on your disciplinary area, you may come across different opinions. Sharing your opinions or reasoned arguments on a particular topic gives you a wider breadth of understanding, and you can comment on other people's posts to add to the discussion. Be courteous and kind at all times. Remember you are talking to real people.

Working in groups

Discussion boards are a great way to work in groups, especially if the group is spread over more than one location or timezone, or some students have work or caring commitments. The boards mean that individuals can make their contributions at a time that suits them, but everyone in the group can see the progress that is being made.

MAKING THE MOST OF BREAKOUT ROOMS

Breakout rooms are spaces for small group interaction within the larger live session. Breakout Groups tend not to be recorded. Both Collaborate Ultra and Teams have breakout rooms. These rooms are often used for group conversations and activities during a live session. Breakout rooms are often the place where you develop your critical understanding of the topic and get to practice applying your skills, as well as building connections with others on your course. Breakout rooms are also an opportunity to get to know other students while you work together on a topic. You could also think about forming a study group, or pairing up with a study buddy, from the people you meet in the breakout rooms.

- Your lecturer sets the scene and then gives you a question to answer, a problem to solve or a topic to discuss. They will then either randomly assign you to the breakouts or put you into pre-assigned groups. In the breakout you work together on the activity set by the lecturer. You might be asked to report back after the breakout or you might be asked to use your results for another activity.
- Being in a breakout group with people you don't know yet can feel a bit daunting. Remember, others will be feeling

just the same. Whether you chat using the mic, text chat or writing on the whiteboard, it is important to talk to each other so that you can get the most from the breakout session. If it's the first time you've met the people in the group you might like to quickly introduce yourselves before starting on the activity.

- It's also a good idea to decide who will report back to the main room at the end of the session, so they can be prepared. Discuss your ideas, share your solutions and working with each other, and make your decisions so that you have an answer by the end of the breakout room timing.
- When you return to the main room, it's likely that your lecturer will invite the groups to share their work with the main group. This is the opportunity to get feedback on your work, so make sure you stick around for this. Your nominated person will report back to the group, but there should also be an opportunity for the other members of the group to add their points as well. Support your spokesperson when they are reporting back and help them.

MAKING THE MOST OF ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

Globally Connected Learning focuses on assessment for learning. That means that the assessments you are asked to undertake (whether coursework or exams) will help you to demonstrate that you have achieved the learning outcomes of the course and the feedback that you receive will support you to develop your understanding and skills. Often the assessments will ask you to engage in an authentic task related to your subject e.g. a complex, real-world task that you might encounter when you graduate.

TOP TIPS

- Make sure you understand what each assessment requires of you, if you're not sure about it or don't understand then ask your lecturer about it.
- Put your assessment deadlines in your calendar and set reminders too. It's important you meet the deadlines.
- Read and think about the feedback you receive (whether that's individual or group feedback), act on it to improve future assessments.
- If you have questions about your feedback or how to use it ask your lecturer.

SUPPORTING YOUR WELLBEING

Your wellbeing is important. At Heriot-Watt we want to support you to be your best and to get the most from your studies. Many factors can affect your wellbeing so we have a range of services to support your wellbeing throughout your studies. If you're struggling with your studies do make sure that you talk to your Personal Tutor, Course Leader or to any of the **HW Student Wellbeing Services** so that you can access the most relevant support.

TOP TIPS TO SUPPORT YOUR WELLBEING

- Plan your time, making sure that you take breaks. Studying constantly (cramming) will not help you understand the topic better, but taking time to let your brain process information during break will help you better understand and retain the information.
- Try to eat healthily and undertake some exercise – this supports your brain to function effectively.
- Make sure you get enough sleep – a tired brain can't take in information, sleep also gives your brain time to process information.

EFFECTIVE LEARNING ADVISORS

The Effective Learning Advisors offer a number of study skills classes and 1:1 support that are designed to help students achieve their academic potential, covering topics such as:

- Planning and organising your studies (e.g. time management, organising coursework and balancing priorities).
- Academic goal setting and maintaining motivation.
- Effective note taking and note making strategies.
- Critical reading and evaluating information.
- Academic writing skills.
- Revision and exam techniques.
- Reflective learning practices.

For more information on how the Effective Learning Advisors can support your studies go to <https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/is/learning-teaching/learning-advisors.htm>

MAKE THE MOST OF GLOBALLY CONNECTED LEARNING

There are many different ways that you can participate in your learning, no matter where you are studying. Choose what works for you. If you're not sure about anything then do get in touch with your course team and / or personal tutor – they are here to help and support you to make the most of Globally Connected Learning and your time at Heriot-Watt.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Student Accessibility Guide

https://lta.hw.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/03_Accessibility-tools-guide-for-students.pdf

Student netiquette guide

https://lta.hw.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/04_Student-netiquette-guide.pdf

Wellbeing services

<https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/students/health-wellbeing.htm>

Making the most of assessment and feedback: A guide for students

https://lta.hw.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/08_student-assessment-guide.pdf

Skills hub

<https://heriotwatt.sharepoint.com/sites/skillshub>



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