How to Study in Trinity
A Guide for International Students

SLD
Student Learning Development

Trinity College Dublin
The University of Dublin

Settling In

Where am I in this big picture?

Coming to study in Trinity might be one of the most exciting experiences of your life. Imagine it like a thrilling journey, with ups and downs, adjustments and new discoveries, answers and sometimes more questions. It may feel overwhelming, and rightly so, because it takes time and energy to establish new lifestyles as a student.

You came over from many miles away, from a country that's maybe similar or not at all to what you are experiencing here in Ireland. You left your friends and family back home and maybe you are out of your comfort zone.

Being an international student takes courage, and you have it.

Academically, you are entering a whole new world. Maybe before you were used to remembering and reproducing information correctly in your exams, without having to write essays or give presentations. For some, questioning the authority of a teacher or lecturer was not encouraged. For others, learning whatever and whenever you wanted was the norm, being able to enrol in modules of your own choice.

Furthermore, many students coming to Trinity were used to constant guidance and academic directions from their teachers, both inside and outside the classroom.

However, being in Trinity means that you are expected to make your own decisions about **why, what, when, how and where you learn.** Except for your assignment deadlines and exams, you will very rarely be told what to do and when, so keeping yourself motivated is going to be the key.

Starting your studies in Trinity is not only about learning, it's also about learning how to learn.

You could prepare by asking yourself some of these questions:

- What do I expect to get out of my studies in Trinity, besides my qualification?
- What do I find easy when it comes to studying?
- What do I find difficult?
- What are my academic strengths?
- What are my academic weaknesses?
- What has worked for me in the past?
- How did I overcome similar situations?

Finding out these things about yourself will help you to identify what you are already doing well, but also what you have to improve in order to perform successfully.

It's also helpful to think of your personality, values and goals. Do you prefer to study by yourself or with others? What do you value in relation to your studies in Trinity?

Getting to know your academic self is the first step towards academic success.

What am I getting myself into?

When you start your studies in Trinity you enter not only the overall culture of the institution, but also the culture of the discipline/s in which you will study. On the one hand, there are certain study skills that are required to be developed by all Trinity students (critical thinking, writing, reading), and you will find that doing so will help you perform successfully in the course of your studies.

On the other hand, academic disciplines might differ in their cultures and you may find that there can be more than one appropriate methodology or language required.

Finding out about the culture and educational expectations of both Trinity and your discipline is another important step in your academic journey.

You can do that by:

- Attending relevant sessions and lunchtime talks during Orientation week;
- Asking your Tutor/Erasmus coordinator what are considered good study practices and what are the assessment methods used in your department;
- Reading the departmental guidelines and course handbooks and exploring the relevant websites of your School;
- Making an individual appointment with SLD;
- Discussing with your peers, S2S mentor or the Students' Union Class Representatives;
- Making an appointment with your Global Officer.

What about my English?

For many of Trinity's international students, English is a second language. That can be frustrating sometimes, especially if you feel it takes longer to find your words and express your opinions. You might feel that you are more aware of how you speak and you don't want to make mistakes when you discuss with your classmates or professors. This feeling is totally normal and almost everybody experiences it.

Moreover, at the beginning it might be a bit difficult to understand the various Irish accents and you will feel that you are making extra effort in staying focused during some of your lectures. This is also something many students experience.

With foreign languages, just like with other things, practice makes it perfect.

You can exercise your English language abilities through formal and informal methods by:

- Attending an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course for strengthening your academic English;
- Finding out if there is any specific academic language to be used in the assignments for your course;
- Keeping a vocabulary notebook with all the new words you are learning;
- Setting up a proofreading system with your classmates or friends and regularly proofreading each other's essays;
- Meeting with the Students' Union Education Officer and finding out about the Grinds service;
- Interacting as much as you can in English with Irish students as well as other international students;
- Joining societies that are active in areas related to your studies.

Learning on my own

Trinity students are expected to become responsible for their study behaviour. You will have to manage your workload and your time, while keeping yourself motivated. You are given a lot of deadlines to reach and, in order to get there, you need to put a lot of work to get your assignments done. When you have many courses/modules, this might become overwhelming unless you manage your time properly.

It is also helpful to evaluate your current study habits and make an analysis of the study methods you are used to, see what works well for you and how you can maximize the positive outcomes.

Set learning goals and ask yourself what you want to achieve during your studies in Trinity.

Some other time management/anti-procrastination strategies are:

- Prioritizing your workload;
- Planning;
- Breaking things into small, manageable pieces;
- Being specific;
- Action builds momentum – do something, anything;
- Using all your time – even travel time can be used to review or quiz yourself;
- Making a commitment – create a deadline if one doesn't exist or you need an earlier one, hang a planner on your wall or use an agenda.

Your life as a student is not only studying. Planning your time means also reaching a balance between your academic work and activities necessary for your wellbeing – social activities, sport, being part of societies, doing volunteer work etc. These are equally important parts of being a student and it might be important for you not to miss out on them.

You can find more ways of giving your studies priority by:

- Attending SLD workshops on organisation and time management;
- Making an individual appointment with SLD;
- Organizing a study group with your peers to discuss assignments and lectures;
- Meeting with your Class Rep or the Students' Union Education Officer;
- Finding out tips and tricks from students in the years ahead.

Who are my lecturers?
(also known as teachers or professors)

There are some significant differences in the responsibilities of lecturers in Trinity College. In some academic cultures, the lecturer is considered an expert whose job is to transfer particular knowledge to the student, providing them with the correct perspective or solution.

In Trinity, however, the lecturer is considered a more advanced colleague in the field who gives academic advice and encourages students to engage with the learning material, but does not give the answers.

Lecturers generally keep set "office hours" when you can make an appointment to meet and speak with them. Furthermore, there will also be Teaching Assistants (TAs) that you can talk to.

The relationship between Trinity academic staff and students is a formal one, yet academic staff remains accessible to students. This might look difficult to achieve when it comes to large classes where you find yourself in a lecture hall together with 200 other students. However, respecting the office hours, you are encouraged to:

- Ask questions;
- Seek advice;
- Discuss ideas;
- Ask for feedback on your assignments and progress;
- Share any concerns you have, as soon as they arise, with your Tutor.

Becoming a critical thinker

Trinity College, like many other universities, is constantly engaged in questioning current ideas and theories and in creating and discovering new knowledge. Lecturers and academic staff, through their research responsibility, are always making breakthroughs in knowledge and innovation.

Being part of the university's academic culture, students are also expected to question what they hear and read, think critically about the evidence of particular theories or points of view and develop their own ideas and arguments. You are expected to move from the question "what?" to questions such as **"why?", "how?", "how important?", "how valid?", "what if?", "what might happen if?"** that will help you understand, criticize and evaluate what you learn and integrate that with your previous knowledge and ideas.

Therefore, **you are encouraged to become not only an independent learner, but also an independent thinker.**

Critical thinking means different things in different disciplines. If you are studying in an education discipline, for example, you will be thinking critically when you apply theory to a practical situation and then reflect on what happened as a result of your application of that particular theory in that situation.

In a discipline which has a less obviously practical application, for example some humanities areas of study, you will be thinking critically when you compare and contrast theories with each other, or when you try to work out gaps or flaws in those theories.

Your lecturers expect that even first year students can do more than just describe a theory or concept in assignments. In addition to describing, lecturers also expect students to analyse and evaluate or judge a concept, or apply a concept or theory to a practical situation.

You can improve your critical thinking skills by:

- Discussing with your Tutor/Erasmus coordinator how you can develop critical arguments in the context of your discipline;

- Discussing with one of your lecturers or teaching assistants during their office hours;

- Attending an SLD workshop on critical thinking;

- Making an individual appointment with SLD to discuss any specific concerns.

Reading with a purpose

A lot of the information you will get during your studies will come from your lectures, but the greater part of it will come from what you read on your own. Reading as a student is different than reading for leisure, and understanding this helps you adapt your habits and maximize your readings. Firstly, determine your purpose. This will help you to focus your attention and to select a suitable strategy.

As a critical reader, it is important to question what you read and evaluate the quality of the sources. It helps if you monitor your understanding, re-read difficult questions and review what you learned. Taking notes is another aspect to have in mind especially considering that your exams will take place at the end of the academic year and going back to your notes then will be more efficient than reading entire text books all over again.

For reading and note-making strategies, you can:

- Ask your Tutor to indicate which parts of the recommended materials are more relevant and why in order to prioritize your readings;

- Organize a study group to discuss various readings with your fellow peers;

- Ask students in the years ahead for hints and tips on how to prioritize readings in your courses;

- Note which books/materials are most regularly mentioned in other books as being important;

- Skim very fast through recommended books, decide which might be most beneficial for you;

- Attend an SLD workshop on reading and note-making;

- Make an individual appointment with SLD;

- Attend a TCD Library course to find out how you can make the most of using the library and all its resources.

Academic writing

Many of the assignments you will have to do in Trinity will involve writing: essays, lab reports, projects. At the end of your studies you'll have to write a dissertation if you are an undergraduate student or a thesis if you are a postgraduate student. All these written assignments might be different than the ones you were used to doing in your home university, or might be something that you've never done before.

To develop or improve your writing style you can:

- Ask for examples of good and bad writing from your lecturers;

- Ask your lecturer what the writing requirements are in your department;

- Find out if there is any specific academic language to be used in the written assignments of your course;

- Enrol yourself in the Academic Skills for Successful Learning Blackboard Module for more information and resources on Essay Writing and Scientific Writing;

- Attend one of the SLD workshops on academic writing or writing for sciences;

- Make an individual appointment with SLD to discuss your writing assignments;

- Attend an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course for strengthening your academic English;

- Make an appointment with the IS services to get support for the technical side of writing – how to use Microsoft Word and other useful programmes;

- Set up a writing group with your peers to discuss and review each other's assignments.

Plagiarism and referencing

Acknowledging your sources is a very important aspect of Trinity academic culture and integrity. Because there is a strong emphasis put on every person developing their own opinions and ideas, it is important to distinguish between those and the ideas and opinions coming from authors, lecturers or peers. Failing to do so will result in being accused of plagiarism, which consists of using any information or exact words from a book, journal or internet site without referencing and without using quotation marks when necessary.

You can find out more about how to avoid plagiarism through referencing by:

- Consulting the course handbook on what is the preferred referencing style in your department;
- Attending one of the SLD workshops on plagiarism;
- Attending one of the TCD Library courses on plagiarism;
- Attending one of the TCD Library courses on Endnote, a programme that automatically organizes references for you;
- Using the Ready Steady Write resource of Academic Practice and eLearning: www.tcd.ie/CAPSL/readysteadywrite
- Attending an EAP course to gain confidence with expressing your own opinions in English.

If your lecturer requires it, you might have to submit your assignment through Turnitin, a programme that detects plagiarism. If this is the case, you might be able to use this programme to check your assignment for plagiarism before the final submission. Double-check this with your lecturer.

Participating in tutorials

The aim of tutorials is to approach a certain topic in greater detail and encourage discussion on different ideas and points of view, as well as clarify any misunderstandings from various readings. Depending on your course, you might be involved in tutorials with only 10-20 students, or in larger ones, with 60 or more.

The way tutorials take place depends on your discipline: some might involve interaction and you will be required to participate and lead discussions, while others might be less interactive. Furthermore, some of them will be led by teaching assistants, while others will involve the lecturers themselves. In most courses you will be assessed based on your participation in tutorials, so it's important to try to contribute to discussions, at least as much as it is required.

In order to get comfortable with participating in tutorials you can:

- Ask your lecturer/teaching assistant what are their expectations from students during tutorials;
- Practice listening to your peers to see how they interact with each other during tutorials;
- Prepare some questions or a comment on something you found interesting before the class so you can demonstrate to your tutor that you understand the material;
- Make an appointment with SLD to identify how you can improve your listening and communication skills;
- Attend an EAP course to practice your academic English and gain more comfort in speaking.

Exams

Most exams in Trinity take place at the end of the academic year, in the course of four weeks in April/May and during Supplemental examinations in September, and only a few of them, depending on the School, take place in January. This might seem odd if you are used to being continuously assessed after each module or have exams at the end of each semester. Furthermore, this is one of the reasons why staying motivated until the end of the year is so important.

Exams in Trinity are managed by the Examinations and Assessments department of the Academic Registry. They take place in various venues, both on and off campus. The examination method depends on your course. In some cases you will have multiple choice questions, while in others you will have to answer essay based questions.

The exam timetable is only available towards the mid-end of Hilary Term.

If you are a student with disabilities, you might not get the same exam accommodation as in your own country.

Finding yourself in the same exam hall with hundreds of other students might seem a bit daunting at the beginning, but you can prepare yourself for that experience by:

- Reading the Student Guidelines and other information on venues and timetables on the Exams and Assessments webpage of the Academic Registry: www.tcd.ie/academicregistry/exams/;

- Consulting past papers on the same webpage in order to see what were the topics up for assessment in previous years and to test yourself to improve your performance;

- Reading your course handbooks and learning outcomes;

- Attending the SLD workshop on exams skills;

- Enrolling yourself in the Academic Skills for Successful Learning Blackboard module to find out more tips for preparing for and performing well on your exams (you can find the instructions here http://student-learning.tcd.ie/)

Remember, examiners want you to PASS, to give you marks. The exam is an opportunity (not a torture) for you to demonstrate that you have engaged with the course material, come to understand it and you are able to show that in writing your exam.

Trinity grading system

Trinity's grading system is captured in the table below.

Degree classification	Grade	Percentage range
First class Honours	I	70-100%
Second class Honours, first division	II.1.	60-69%
Second class Honours, second division	II.2.	50-59%
Third class Honours	III	40-49%
Fail	F1	30-39%
	F2	Below 29%

Usually, getting 70% for an assignment means excellent performance of the student who showed comprehensive understanding of the topic/subject matter and an excellent ability to structure arguments in a critical manner, fluently and creatively.

It is possible to get 100% in a maths exam, but it's very rare to get that grade or even more than 70% in an essay. You should know from the beginning that getting 70% on an assignment means that your academic performance and results are excellent.

II.1. means the student had a very good performance on the subject, while II.2 stands for a good performance. The difference between the two categories might come from various aspects, depending on the type of assignment and the requirements of your course. However, higher marks are usually linked to critical thinking, structure of arguments and originality.

Each department has different guidelines and expectations from students when it comes to the grades awarded. To get a better understanding of this, you can:

- Make an appointment with your Tutor to find out more about the departmental requirements;

- During office hours, ask for feedback from your lecturer to see how you can improve;

- Make an appointment with SLD to identify concrete strategies for improving your skills.

These are just a few tips to get you going, you'll discover many more on your own. Allow yourself time to get accustomed to Trinity's academic culture. Academic skills develop over time and it takes a while until you figure out what works for you.

And remember,

SLD is here to help you reach your academic potential!

Where exactly do I go?

Student Learning Development

7-9 South Leinster Street, 3rd Floor

Web: student-learning.tcd.ie

Email: student.learning@tcd.ie

Phone: 01-896-1407

Blackboard: Academic Skills for Successful Learning

Tutorial Service

Web: Who is my tutor?
www.tcd.ie/Senior_Tutor/your-tutor/who/

Global Officers

The following schools have Global Officers: English, Histories and Humanities, Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies, Social Sciences and Philosophy, Computer Science and Statistics, Physics, Natural Sciences, Chemistry, Dental Science, Nursing and Midwifery, Mathematics and the LIR.

Web: www.tcd.ie/globalrelations/aboutus/

Students' Union Education Officer

House 6, Trinity College Dublin Campus

Web: www.tcdsu.org

Email: education@tcdsu.org

Student2Student

7-9 South Leinster Street, 3rd floor

Web: student2student.tcd.ie/

Email: student2student@tcd.ie

English for Academic Purposes

Room 4091, Arts Building

Web: www.tcd.ie/slscs/english/
Phone: 01 8961127

Email: clcsinfo@tcd.ie

TCD Library

Web: www.tcd.ie/Library/support/

Information Systems Services

Áras an Phiarsaigh, ground floor

Web: isservices.tcd.ie/

Email: helpdesk@tcd.ie

Phone: 01 896 2000

Maths Help Room

Maths Seminar Room

18 Westland Row, 2nd floor

Mon-Fri, from 1-2pm

Programming Support Room

– help to all Computer Science and Engineering students taking programming courses

Web: www.scss.tcd.ie/misc/psc/

Academic Registry – Exams and Assessments

Web: www.tcd.ie/academicregistry/exams/

Academic Practice and eLearning

Web: www.tcd.ie/CAPSL/students/

Sources:

Marshall, Lorain, Rowland, Frances (1996), A Guide to Learning Independently, Open University Press

Academic Skills Unit, University of Melbourne, Australia "Studying in Australia. 10 Tips for International Students"

Trinity Grading System
http://www.tcd.ie/study/non-eu/study-abroad/to-trinity/erasmus/Apply/Grading.php

National University of Ireland: Grade Descriptors
http://www.nuigalway.ie/geography/documents/nui_grade_descriptors.pdf

Further reading:

Bailey, S. (2006) Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students, 2nd ed. Abingdon: Routledge.

Brandt, C. (2009) Read, Research and Write: Academic Skills for ESL Students in Higher Education, London : Sage.

McMillan, K., Weyers, J. (2012) Study Skills for International Students, 1st ed. Prentice Hall

Lowes, R. (2004) The International Student's Guide: Studying in English at University. London: Sage.

The World of Trinity. International Students Blog

http://tcdglobal.wordpress.com/

This brochure was created by Student Learning Development, Trinity College Dublin, based on the "10 Tips for International Students" document of the Academic Skills Unit, University of Melbourne, Australia