



# Self-Study Guide

Independent Study Skills for DCU International Academy Students

International Foundation Year (IFY)



*DCU International Academy, DCU Glasnevin Campus*

**2026 – 2027**

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## Contents

This guide has been written for students studying the International Foundation Year with DCU International Academy. It brings together the study skills you will need to succeed on your programme and, afterwards, in your degree at DCU.

You do not need to read it from beginning to end. Use the list below to find the section you need, and come back to it during the year.

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### A note on this guide

Information about your programme, assessment and regulations comes from the IFY Student Handbook 2026–2027. Information about DCU services comes from Dublin City University’s own web pages. Where general study advice comes from another source, that source is named at the end of the section. Everything was checked in August 2026.

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## 1. Introduction

Dear students,

Welcome to DCU International Academy. The staff here have put this guide together to help you build effective study skills, manage your time, improve your research and writing, and develop the independent thinking that university study asks for.

The International Foundation Year is not simply a year of extra classes. It is the year in which you learn how to study at university level in English. Teaching methods at DCUIA may be quite different from those you are used to. You will work in lectures, seminars, tutorials and workshops, and you will practise a wide range of study techniques including individual and group presentations, project work and extended essay writing.

Your programme is designed to help you plan your own workload and find the motivation, discipline and time to study. DCUIA will give you opportunities to become a confident, independent learner who can recognise your own strengths and weaknesses and act on them. Taking responsibility for your own learning is the single most important part of being a successful student.

### How to use this guide

- Read sections 2 and 3 early in Semester 1. Time management and referencing are the two things that cause students the most difficulty later.
- Use sections 4, 5 and 6 while you are working on coursework.
- Read section 7 at least four weeks before your first examinations.
- Keep sections 10 and 11 for the moments when you need support.

### Two things worth saying now

First, you are not expected to already know how to do this. Every skill in this guide is something you learn, practise and get better at. Nobody arrives able to write a referenced academic essay in a second language.

Second, ask early. Every service described in this guide is free to you, and all of them are busiest in the last two weeks of term, when they can help you least. Asking a question in week two is easy. Asking in week twelve is not.

*Source: DCU International Academy, IFY Student Handbook 2026–2027.*

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## 2. Time management and organisation

Most students who struggle on a foundation programme do not struggle because the work is too hard. They struggle because too much of it arrives at once. Managing your time is a skill you can learn, and it makes everything else on your programme easier.

## a) Create a study schedule

Your timetable will be given to you by IFY administrative staff at the beginning of the academic year. It shows three kinds of contact time, and it is important to understand the difference between them:

- **Class** — attendance is required.
- **Clinic** — attendance is strongly encouraged. This is where you bring the thing you did not understand.
- **Supervised study** — attendance is strongly encouraged. Protected time to work with a lecturer nearby.

Build your own study schedule around those fixed hours. A realistic schedule has three features: it includes everything you actually have to do, it leaves gaps, and you can see the whole week at once.

- Use a planner or a digital calendar to record every deadline as soon as you are given it.
- Set a specific goal for each study session, not just a length of time. “Read chapter 4 and write ten lines of notes” beats “study for two hours”.
- Set aside separate time for studying, for revision, and for coursework. They are different activities.
- Balance academic work with breaks. Working without rest leads to burnout — a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress.
- Schedule the things that are not study as well: meals, sleep, sport, and time with friends. A schedule that ignores them will not survive contact with a real week.

### A sample IFY study week

|       | Monday           | Tuesday      | Wednesday       | Thursday   | Friday           |
|-------|------------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|------------------|
| 09:00 | Class            |              | Class           |            | Class            |
| 10:00 |                  | Class        |                 | Class      |                  |
| 11:00 |                  |              |                 |            |                  |
| 12:00 | Clinic           |              | Library reading |            | Supervised study |
| 13:00 |                  | Own revision |                 | Coursework |                  |
| 14:00 | Supervised study |              |                 |            |                  |
| 15:00 |                  |              | Clinic          |            | Review the week  |
| 16:00 |                  | Sport / club |                 | Free time  |                  |
| 17:00 |                  |              |                 |            |                  |

*An example of one week planned around IFY class, clinic and supervised study hours. Your own timetable will differ.*

## b) Prioritise your tasks

When several deadlines arrive together, the question is not “what shall I do first?” but “what happens if I do this last?”

- Sort your tasks by what is urgent and what is important. Work that is both should be done today. Work that is important but not yet urgent is what you should be protecting time for.
- Break large tasks into smaller steps. “Write essay” is not a task; “find three sources”, “write the introduction” and “check the referencing” are.
- Review study material regularly instead of rushing to cover everything before a deadline.
- Start early. Starting badly is still starting, and a first draft can be improved. A blank page cannot.

### c) Avoid procrastination

Procrastination is delaying or postponing a task. It is rarely about laziness. Most often it happens because a task feels too large, too vague, or too likely to go badly.

- Make the first step small enough to be easy. Open the document and write one sentence.
- Use the Pomodoro technique: work in focused blocks with short breaks between them.
- Remove distractions before you start. Put your phone in another room, not face-down on the desk.
- Set short-term goals with a small reward for finishing them.

#### One Pomodoro cycle



*The Pomodoro technique: short blocks of focused work with planned breaks.*

### d) Know your deadlines

DCUIA will give you a calendar of all coursework with hand-in dates, arranged so that the work is spread evenly through the year. Put every one of those dates into your own calendar on the day you receive it, with a reminder several days before.

Coursework submitted after the deadline without a valid reason loses marks: 10% for each day it is late. Your tutors will explain the arrangements for submitting each piece of work.

If something outside your control affects your work — illness, injury, or a serious family situation — speak to the IFY team as soon as possible. DCUIA operates an Access Arrangements and Special Considerations Policy, but an application must be made before the coursework is completed or the exam takes place. It cannot be requested after you receive your results.

*Source: DCU International Academy, IFY Student Handbook 2026–2027. The Pomodoro technique is a time-management method developed by Francesco Cirillo.*

### 3. Referencing and academic integrity

Referencing is how you show where your information came from. It is one of the clearest differences between school work and university work, and it is worth learning properly in your first term rather than discovering it during your first essay.

#### a) Why referencing matters

- It gives credit to the people whose work you have used.
- It lets your reader find and check your sources.
- It shows the marker how widely you have read, which is part of what is being assessed.
- It protects you from an accusation of plagiarism.

#### b) The two halves of a reference

Every referencing system has two parts that work together: a short marker in your text at the point where you use a source, and a full entry in a list at the end of your assignment. If a source appears in one, it must appear in the other.

The example below uses the Harvard style. Always check which style your module requires — DCU Library supports Harvard, APA 7th edition, Chicago, IEEE, MHRA, MLA, OSCOLA, Vancouver and IHS, and different subjects use different ones.

#### What the parts of a reference mean

IN-TEXT CITATION — inside your paragraph

Recent research supports this view (Ní Bhroin, 2023, p. 47).

← author, year, and the page number if you are quoting directly

REFERENCE LIST ENTRY — at the end of your assignment

Ní Bhroin, S. (2023) *Learning to Learn*. 2nd edn. Dublin: Gill Books.

author

year

title

edition

place

publisher

The exact layout differs by source type. Check yours in [Cite Them Right Online](#), free through DCU Library.

*The parts of an in-text citation and a reference list entry, in Harvard style.*

Two rules that catch students out. Page numbers must be included for a direct quotation — for example (Smith, 2000, p. 20). They may be included for paraphrased information but are not required. And your reference list is arranged alphabetically by the author's surname, not in the order you used the sources.

#### c) The referencing tools DCU gives you

You do not have to memorise the formats. DCU Library provides tools that do most of the work, and they are free to you as a DCUIA student.

- **Cite Them Right Online.** DCU Library subscribes to this on your behalf. It shows you the correct layout for almost any source type — book, ebook, journal article, website, report, video — in each supported style, with examples.
- **Zotero.** A free reference manager that saves sources as you find them and generates your citations and reference list. DCU Library provides guidance on setting it up.
- **LETS.** The Library Etutorial for Students is a set of short self-paced online tutorials. The LETScite section covers avoiding plagiarism, formatting citations, paraphrasing, and using reference management tools.
- **Your subject librarian.** DCU Library offers classes, workshops and one-to-one help with referencing questions.

Use these tools to generate citations automatically, but always check the result against the style guide. Reference generators make mistakes, and the mistake becomes yours once you submit it.

#### d) Academic misconduct

Academic misconduct is any act that gives a student an unfair advantage in their academic performance, whether it is intentional or not. It is taken very seriously by DCUIA and by universities in Ireland. It results in a penalty, and it can mean failing the assessment, the module or the whole qualification.

DCUIA recognises the following types of academic misconduct:

- **Plagiarism.** Copying information, thoughts or ideas from a published or unpublished source without saying where they came from. DCUIA may check your work using an online plagiarism detection system such as Turnitin.
- **Misuse of artificial intelligence.** Using AI to generate content that directly meets the learning outcomes of a module; using AI without acknowledging it as a source; presenting AI-generated content as your own work; or submitting a reference list generated by AI that turns out to be misleading or invented.
- **Collusion.** Two or more students working together to produce individual assessments containing the same ideas and text. Lending your coursework to a friend, or leaving it on a shared computer, can result in a penalty for collusion even if you did not intend it.
- **Fabrication of results.** Presenting results that did not come from your own observations or calculations.
- **Subcontracting.** Getting a third party to produce all or part of an assessment for you — a paid essay-writing service, or a friend or family member.
- **Use of translation services.** Using a person, a service or an online tool to translate work into English that you first wrote in another language, for your EAP, EAPPU or RCS coursework.
- **Examination misconduct.** Seeking an unfair advantage in an exam: using notes, communicating with anyone inside or outside the room, using a pre-programmed calculator, or copying from another student.

For collusion, fabrication of results, subcontracting, use of translation services and examination misconduct, the mark is set to zero. For plagiarism, the penalty depends on how much of the work is

affected and how much the assessment is worth. The full DCUIA Academic Misconduct Policy is available from DCUIA on request.

### e) If your work is questioned

You will be invited to an interview with at least two members of staff, and you should bring any evidence that the work is your own — for example the notes you made while researching it. If the original source was found, or if Turnitin was used, that evidence will be shown to you at the meeting. You will be told the outcome in writing, and you can appeal through the DCUIA Appeals process.

DCUIA will also provide support to help you improve your academic skills. The purpose is that you understand what went wrong and do not repeat it.

### f) How to stay on the right side of the line

- Take notes in your own words as you read, and write down the source straight away. Most accidental plagiarism happens weeks later, when you can no longer remember which words were yours.
- Keep quotations short, put them in quotation marks, and give the page number.
- Paraphrasing means expressing the idea in your own words and sentence structure — not changing a few words. A paraphrase still needs a citation.
- If you are unsure whether something needs a reference, reference it.
- Ask your tutor before you use an AI tool for any part of an assessment. The rules differ between modules, and “I did not know” is not a defence.

*Source: DCU International Academy, IFY Student Handbook 2026–2027. DCU Library citing and referencing guidance and LETS tutorial ([dcu.ie/library/citing-and-referencing](https://dcu.ie/library/citing-and-referencing)). Checked August 2026.*

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## 4. Effective note-taking

Notes are not a transcript. If you write down everything, you are copying rather than thinking, and you will not remember much of it. Good notes are shorter than the lecture and easier to revise from.

### a) Choose a method that suits the material

There is no single best system. Most students end up using two or three depending on the subject.

**The Cornell method.** Divide the page into three areas: a narrow cue column on the left, a wide notes area on the right, and a summary strip along the bottom. You take notes in the main area during class, write key words and questions in the cue column afterwards, and write the summary from memory. It is particularly good for subjects with a lot of terminology, and it turns your notes into a self-test: cover the notes area and answer the cues.

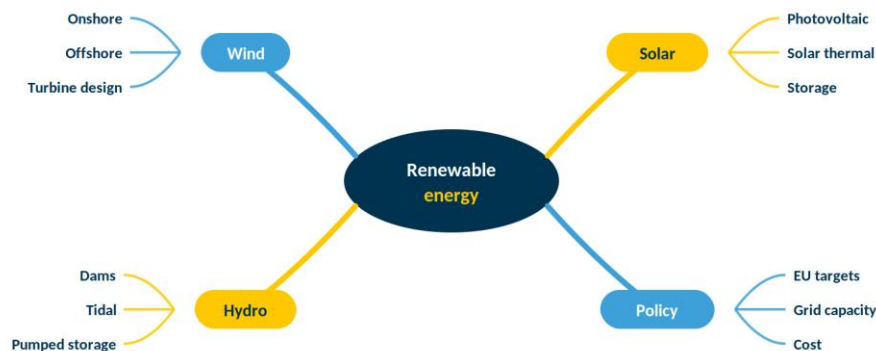
## The Cornell note-taking layout

| Module, topic and date                                                                  |                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Cue column</b><br>Key words<br>Questions to answer later<br>Formulae<br>Names, dates | <b>Notes taken in class</b><br><hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| <b>Summary — write this from memory, after the class</b><br><hr/> <hr/>                 |                                                                                            |

*The Cornell layout. The summary is written after the class, from memory.*

**Mind mapping.** Put the topic in the centre, add main branches for the major ideas, then smaller branches for the detail. Because it shows how ideas connect rather than listing them in order, it suits topics where the relationships matter, and it is very useful for planning an essay or revising a whole module on one page.

### A mind map of one topic



*Start with the topic in the middle, add main branches, then details. Good for revision and for planning an essay.*

*A mind map showing how the parts of one topic relate to each other.*

**The outline method.** Headings, subheadings and indented bullet points. It is fast, it works well in lectures that are already clearly structured, and it is easy to type. Use indentation consistently so that the level of each point is obvious, and develop your own system and stick to it.

## b) Take notes actively

- Summarise key points in your own words rather than copying the slide.

- Use abbreviations and symbols so you can write faster — but keep them consistent so they still make sense in April.
- Leave space. You will want to add to your notes later.
- Write down the questions you did not get an answer to, and bring them to a clinic hour.
- Highlight or underline sparingly. If most of the page is highlighted, nothing is.

### c) Review and revise your notes

This is the step nearly everyone skips, and it is the one that makes the difference. Notes you never look at again are notes you wasted the class writing.

- Reread and tidy your notes within a day of the class, while you still remember what your own shorthand meant.
- Go over them regularly, not just before exams.
- Discuss topics with classmates. Explaining something out loud shows you very quickly whether you actually understand it.
- Turn your notes into flashcards or short quizzes and test yourself, rather than rereading passively.

*Source: The Cornell note-taking system was developed at Cornell University. Other methods described here are standard study-skills practice.*

## 5. Reading and research skills

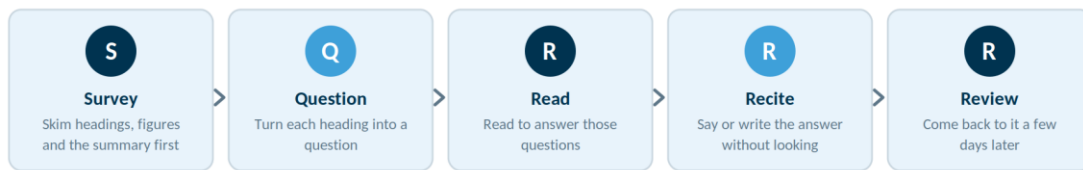
At foundation and degree level you will be given more to read than you can read closely. Part of the skill is deciding how to read each thing, and how much of it you actually need.

### a) Active reading strategies

- **Scanning.** Move through the text quickly to find something specific — a name, a date, a figure, a keyword. Use it when you already know what you are looking for.
- **Skimming.** Read quickly for a general overview. Focus on the title, headings, the introduction, the conclusion, and the first sentence of each paragraph. Use it to decide whether a source is worth reading properly.
- **Close reading.** Slow, careful reading of the parts that matter, with notes and questions in the margin. Use it for the small number of sources you will actually cite.

For a chapter you need to understand and remember, the SQ3R method gives you a structure.

## SQ3R — a way to read a chapter properly



*SQ3R: survey, question, read, recite, review.*

Ask questions while you read, and write them down. Reading with a question in mind is far more effective than reading from the first word to the last.

### b) Research skills

As a DCUIA student your student card gives you access to all three DCU libraries and to the library's online collections. That is a much better starting point than a general web search.

- **Library Search.** DCU Library's search tool covers books, ebooks and journal articles across the collection. Start here.
- **The A–Z of Library Databases.** Subject-specific databases, which is where most academic journal content actually lives.
- **Journal Finder.** Use this to check whether DCU has access to a particular journal.
- **The O'Reilly Library print collection.** You can borrow up to 14 items at a time, on one-week and three-week loans, and manage renewals through your library account online.
- **LETS.** The LETSfind modules cover database searching, search techniques and how to evaluate a source.

### c) Judging whether a source is any good

Not everything you find is usable in academic work. Before you cite something, ask:

- Who wrote it, and what is their expertise? An author with a named institution is a different proposition from an anonymous page.
- When was it published? In fast-moving subjects a source from ten years ago may be out of date.
- Where was it published? A peer-reviewed journal, a university press and a government agency carry more weight than a blog or a commercial website.
- Why was it written? Something written to sell you a product or advance a campaign is not neutral evidence.
- Does it give its own sources? Work that cites nothing cannot be checked.

Wikipedia is a reasonable place to get your bearings on an unfamiliar topic and to find the primary sources listed at the bottom of the article. It is not an academic source and should not appear in your reference list.

Keep track of every source as you find it, using Zotero or a simple document. Looking for a half-remembered article the night before a deadline is a bad use of your evening.

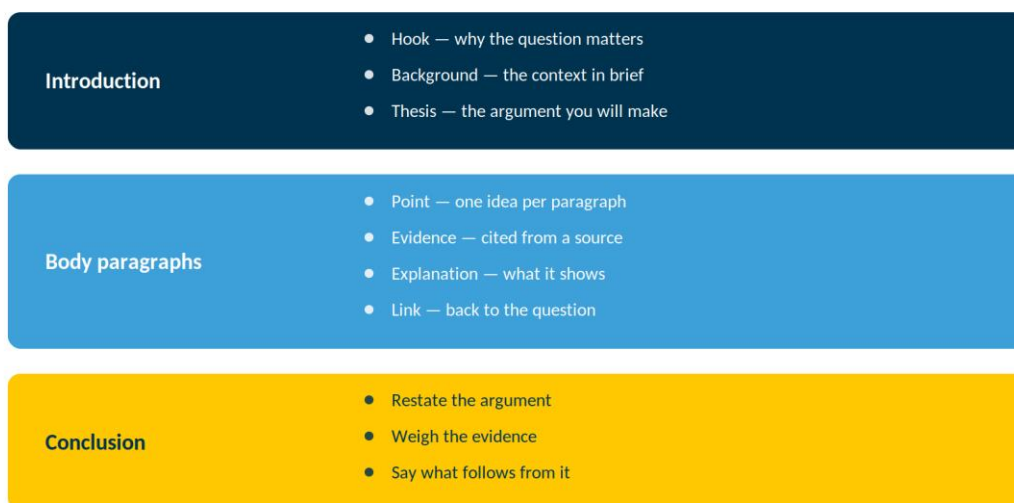
## 6. Academic writing skills

Academic writing is a style you learn, not a talent you have. It has a recognisable structure, a particular kind of language, and a clear standard of evidence. Once you know what it is asking for, it becomes much more manageable.

### a) Structure your writing

Most assignments follow the same shape: an introduction, a series of body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Work out the structure before you write, and keep within the word limit.

#### The shape of an academic essay



Every paragraph should be doing a job. If you cannot say what a paragraph is for, it probably needs rewriting.

*The structure of a standard academic essay.*

Each body paragraph should make one point and support it. A reliable pattern is point, evidence, explanation, link: state your point in the first sentence, give evidence from a source with a citation, explain what that evidence shows, and link back to the question.

### b) Develop a strong argument

- State your argument clearly and early. The reader should know by the end of your introduction what you are going to say.
- Support every claim with reliable evidence from academic sources, and cite it properly.
- Use formal academic language and avoid slang and informal expressions.
- Address counterarguments respectfully and give a reasoned response. Acknowledging the other side makes your own argument stronger, not weaker.

- Avoid unsupported personal opinion. “I think this is wrong” is not an argument; “the evidence from X suggests otherwise” is.
- Keep a logical flow. Each paragraph should follow from the one before it.

### c) Write in an academic style

- Prefer precise words to vague ones. “Increased by 12%” is better than “increased a lot”.
- Be cautious in your claims. Academic writing uses hedging — “this suggests”, “the evidence indicates” — because very few things are proven absolutely.
- Write in full sentences and avoid contractions such as “don’t” and “it’s”.
- Define technical terms the first time you use them.
- Do not use a long word where a short one will do. Clarity is the goal, not complexity.

### d) Revising, editing and proofreading

These are three different jobs, and doing them at the same time is why editing feels so difficult. Do them in order, and leave time between finishing the draft and checking it.

1. **Revising — read for sense and focus.** Have you answered the question? Do your ideas follow a logical line? Is the structure right, with a relevant introduction, well-developed paragraphs and an effective conclusion? What should be added or cut?
2. **Editing — read for accuracy of language.** Is the style appropriately academic? Are the citations correct for your subject? Are the sentences complete and correctly punctuated? Have you used the right words and word forms?
3. **Proofreading — read for surface errors.** Spelling, consistent headings and fonts, spacing and margins, and correct use of punctuation. Read it aloud, or read it backwards sentence by sentence, to catch what your eye skips over.

### e) The DCU Writing Centre

The DCU Writing Centre supports all DCU students with academic writing, and it is free. It is located on the ground floor of the O’Reilly Library on the Glasnevin campus.

- Book a 30-minute one-to-one appointment with an academic writing coach, in person or online.
- Attend a free 45-minute workshop on topics such as building an argument, critical writing, and managing procrastination.
- Use the online resources and video tutorials on DCU’s DEVELOP platform.
- Join the Virtual Writing and Study Room, a facilitated online session that gives you protected time to write.

DCU also has Learning Skills Advisors, who can help with note-taking, reading strategies, time management, group work, presentations and exam preparation. Both services can be booked through [dcu.ie/studentsupport](https://dcu.ie/studentsupport).

Bring a draft and a specific question. “Can you look at my essay?” is harder to help with than “I am not sure my introduction sets up my argument — can we look at that?”

Source: DCU Student Support, learning support and the Writing Centre ([dcu.ie/studentsupport/build-your-learning-confidence](http://dcu.ie/studentsupport/build-your-learning-confidence)). The revising, editing and proofreading distinction follows Leki, I. (1995) *Academic Writing: Exploring Processes and Strategies*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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## 7. Exam preparation and revision

Your DCUIA modules are assessed by coursework, by examination, or by both. All classes are delivered face to face on campus, and end-of-semester tests, resits and final exams are paper-based, sat in the centre and supervised by centre staff. Details of the exams for each module will be given to you by your tutors.

### a) Plan ahead

- Start revising at least two to four weeks before your exams, not in the final week.
- Make a revision timetable that covers every module and stick to it.
- Work out early which modules are assessed by exam, by coursework, or by both, and what each is worth.
- Practise with past papers or sample questions, under timed conditions at least once.
- Ask your tutors what the exam format will be. Knowing whether you face short answers or an essay changes how you revise.

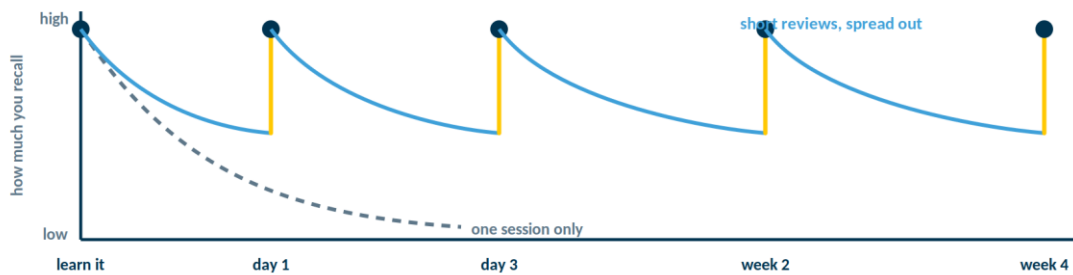
### b) Use active revision techniques

Rereading your notes feels productive and is one of the least effective things you can do. Revision works when you make your brain retrieve the information rather than simply look at it.

- Summarise your notes down into key points, then summarise those onto a single page.
- Test yourself with flashcards or questions, and check afterwards rather than as you go.
- Teach the material to someone else. If you cannot explain it simply, you do not yet understand it.
- Use mnemonics and visualisation for lists and sequences you have to memorise.
- Practise writing full answers by hand and to time. Your exams are handwritten, and writing at speed is itself a skill.

Spread your revision out rather than concentrating it. Reviewing the same material briefly on several occasions across a few weeks produces much stronger recall than one long session.

### Spaced revision beats one long session



*Short reviews spread across several weeks hold far better than one long session.*

### c) DCUIA exam regulations

You must follow DCUIA regulations in your examinations. Invigilators — who may be your tutors or DCUIA administrative staff — make sure that all students follow them.

#### Before the exam:

- Be on time. If you are late you might not be allowed to take the exam.
- All exams are handwritten, and you should use only black or blue pens.
- Your tutors will tell you whether a calculator may be used. DCUIA has regulations about the type of calculator permitted, and you must remove any case, lid or cover with printed instructions or formulae on it before you bring it in.

#### You must not take any of the following into the exam room:

- Notes, books or an electronic dictionary
- A calculator case or calculator instructions
- Any device with text, data, storage or digital capability — a mobile phone, tablet, MP3 player, reading pen, smartwatch or watch with a data storage device
- Food
- Water bottles with labels, or non-transparent bottles. Water bottles must be transparent and without labels
- Jackets or blazers
- Bags or pencil cases

#### In the exam room:

- Follow the invigilators' instructions at all times.
- Put your student ID card, or other authorised identification, on your desk.
- Do not talk to or try to communicate with any other student, inside or outside the room.
- Do not disturb or distract other students, and do not try to help or borrow anything from another student.
- Stay seated and silent until the invigilator allows you to leave.

**At the end:** do not take any question papers, answer booklets or other exam stationery from the room. Hand in your answer booklets including any notes or rough work, with rough work crossed out.

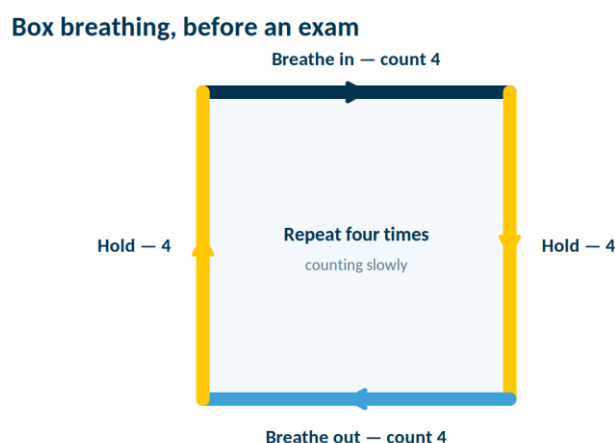
#### d) Resits

If you do not reach the required grade in your End of Semester 1 test or your Final Exam, you have the option to resit. To be eligible you must have attempted the original test or exam — you cannot resit an exam you did not sit. All resits take place in person. Resits for EAP Final Exam components are taken separately, so if you only need to improve one component you may resit that component alone. Resit fees apply. Confirm the current dates and fees with the IFY team.

#### e) Managing exam anxiety

Feeling nervous before an exam is normal and, in moderation, useful. It becomes a problem when it stops you sleeping, or when your mind goes blank in the room. These things help.

- Get enough sleep in the days before the exam. A tired brain retrieves information badly, and the last hours of revision are worth less than the sleep you give up for them.
- Eat properly and keep moving. Exercise is one of the most reliable ways to reduce stress.
- Know the practical details in advance — where the room is, what time you need to arrive, what you may bring. Removing the small uncertainties reduces the overall load.
- Read all the questions carefully before you start answering, and plan how long you will spend on each.
- If your mind goes blank, put the pen down and breathe slowly for thirty seconds. It passes.



*Box breathing: a simple technique for slowing your breathing before or during an exam.*

If exam anxiety is affecting your sleep, your health or your ability to study, speak to the IFY team or to DCU Counselling. This is a common reason students ask for support, and it is treated as such.

#### f) Access arrangements and special consideration

DCUIA operates an Access Arrangements and Special Considerations Policy. Speak to the IFY team as soon as possible if you have a permanent disability or specific learning need, a temporary illness or

injury at the time of an assessment, or if something beyond your control affects you — for example a serious illness or death in your immediate family.

An application for access arrangements must be made before the coursework is completed or the exam takes place, and special consideration cannot be requested after you receive your final results. Information about your personal circumstances is confidential and is stored securely.

*Source: DCU International Academy, IFY Student Handbook 2026–2027. Spaced retrieval practice is a long-established finding in cognitive psychology, originating with Ebbinghaus (1885).*

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## 8. Participation and communication skills

All teaching at DCUIA is conducted in English, and you are encouraged to use English as much as possible while you are on DCUIA premises. Speaking in class is uncomfortable at first for almost everyone, and it is one of the fastest ways to improve.

### a) Take part in class

- Be willing to share your thoughts, even when you are not certain you are right. Seminars are for working out ideas, not for reciting correct answers.
- Listen actively to your classmates and your tutors. Respond to what has just been said rather than waiting for a gap to say your prepared point.
- Ask questions when something is unclear. If you did not understand it, several other people did not either.
- Prepare one question or comment before a seminar. Having something ready makes speaking far easier.
- Use clinic hours for the questions you did not want to ask in front of the class.

### b) Improve your presentations

You will give both individual and group presentations during your programme. The most common mistakes are putting too much on the slides and not rehearsing out loud.

- Practise speaking clearly and at a steady pace. Nerves make everyone speed up.
- Use slides with minimal text and strong visuals. Slides support you; they are not your script.
- Rehearse aloud, standing up, at least twice — ideally once in front of somebody.
- Maintain eye contact with your audience rather than reading from the screen.
- Time yourself. Going over the limit is one of the easiest marks to lose.
- Prepare for questions. Think of the three most likely ones and have an answer ready.



### c) Working in a group

- Agree who is doing what, and by when, in the first meeting. Write it down.
- Exchange contact details and agree how you will communicate.
- Set your own internal deadline several days before the real one.
- If someone is not contributing, raise it early and politely within the group. If it does not improve, tell your tutor before the deadline rather than afterwards.

Be careful about the line between group work and collusion. Discussing ideas together is normal and encouraged. Producing individual assessments that contain the same text is academic misconduct. If an assignment is individual, the writing must be yours alone.

### d) Having your say about the programme

Each stream — Humanities, Science, Engineering and Business — elects stream representatives in the first weeks of Semester 1. Representatives collect feedback from their peer group, attend meetings with IFY administration, raise issues and ideas, and report the outcomes back. If a stream has a large number of students, two representatives may be elected.

Once a month you will also be asked to complete a short anonymous online survey about your experience, covering the teaching, the facilities and the resources. The more detailed your feedback, the better staff can understand it and act on it.

If you have a problem with any part of the programme, your first point of contact is your tutor or a school coordinator. Most issues are resolved informally. If you are not satisfied with the outcome, DCUIA has a formal complaints procedure.

*Source: DCU International Academy, IFY Student Handbook 2026–2027.*

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## 9. Digital learning skills

Almost everything on your programme runs through a small number of systems. Learning them properly in your first fortnight saves a great deal of trouble later.

### a) DCUIA Learn (Canvas)

DCUIA Learn (Canvas) is the learning and assessment platform for your programme. DCUIA will show you how to use it, and the Student Hub area of the platform contains a student user guide and “how to” videos.

- Check it regularly, not only when you are expecting something.
- Submit assignments through it by the stated deadline, and keep the submission confirmation.
- Read the feedback on returned work. Written feedback from your tutors is there to help your learning, and the next assignment is where you use it.
- Turn on notifications so that you do not miss an announcement.

### b) Your DCU accounts

When you are registered you will receive a DCU email address and set up multi-factor authentication, which also gives you access to the campus wireless network.

- **DCU Apps.** DCU’s installation of Google Workspace for education, which provides your student email and cloud file storage.
- **Eduroam.** The campus wireless network, available across all DCU campuses including the student residences.
- **Multi-factor authentication.** Set this up when you register, and keep a backup method in case you lose your phone.
- **PC labs.** Open-access computer labs are available on campus. Do not save your work on a lab machine — the data is wiped regularly. Save to your DCU Apps account or to your own device.
- **The DTS Service Desk.** Digital Technology Solutions handle IT problems, network issues, hardware, lost files, printing, photocopying and scanning. Locations are listed at [dcu.ie/dts](https://dcu.ie/dts).

### c) Technical requirements

For the best experience with DCUIA Learn (Canvas), use a computer that can run the most recent browser versions — ideally one no more than five years old, with at least 1 GB of RAM. Keep your operating system up to date with security updates, always use the current version of your browser, and make sure cookies and JavaScript are enabled. If you see a warning that your browser does not meet the minimum requirements even after updating, log out, clear your browser cache and cookies, and log in again.

### d) Useful tools

- **Zotero** — for saving sources and generating references.
- **A calendar app** — for deadlines, with reminders set several days early.

- **A flashcard app** — for testing yourself on terminology and formulae.
- **Google Scholar** — for finding academic articles. Set DCU as your library link so that you can see what you have access to.
- **Your phone's focus mode** — for the Pomodoro blocks in section 2.

### e) Stay cyber-secure

- Use a strong, unique password for your DCU account, and never reuse a password from another site.
- Keep multi-factor authentication switched on. If you receive an approval request you did not initiate, deny it and change your password.
- Be sceptical of emails asking you to log in urgently, confirm your details, or pay a fee. Check the sender's address carefully, and if in doubt contact DTS rather than clicking the link.
- No legitimate DCU service will ask you for your password by email.
- Back up important work to your DCU Apps account or another cloud service. A lost laptop the week before a deadline should be inconvenient, not a disaster.
- Lock your screen when you leave a shared computer.

*Source: DCU International Academy, IFY Student Handbook 2026–2027. DCU technology information for students ([dcu.ie/sal/welcome-student-advice-hub/technology](https://dcu.ie/sal/welcome-student-advice-hub/technology)) and DCU Digital Technology Solutions ([dcu.ie/dts](https://dcu.ie/dts)). Checked August 2026.*

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## 10. Well-being and motivation

You cannot study well if you are exhausted, isolated or unwell. Looking after yourself is not separate from your academic work; it is part of it.

### a) Maintain a healthy routine

- Aim for seven to nine hours of sleep a night. Sleep is when memory consolidates, so studying instead of sleeping usually costs more than it gains.
- Eat regularly and reasonably well. Cooking for yourself is cheaper and generally better than living on what is quickest.
- Exercise regularly. The DCU Sports Centre on the Glasnevin campus has a gym, a 25-metre pool, fitness classes and courts, and there are dozens of student sports clubs.
- Take real breaks. Scrolling on your phone is not a break for your brain in the way a walk outside is.
- Get some daylight early in the day, particularly in the Irish winter when it is dark by mid-afternoon.

### b) Stay motivated

- Set realistic goals and mark the small achievements. Finishing a difficult draft deserves acknowledging.

- Keep a growth mindset. A poor mark on one assignment is information about what to do differently, not a verdict on your ability.
- Surround yourself with people who are also working. Studying alongside others, even quietly, helps more than most people expect.
- Remember why you are here. Write down what you want from the year and look at it in February, when motivation is usually at its lowest.
- Expect a dip. Almost every student finds weeks six to ten of a first term harder than the beginning. It is normal and it passes.

### c) If things are not going well

The IFY team is your first point of contact for both academic and pastoral issues. If you are experiencing difficulties, or want feedback on your academic progress, contact them and they will arrange a one-to-one meeting. They are available by email, by telephone, or in person at IFY Reception.

You also have access to the full range of DCU student services, which are free and confidential:

- **DCU Counselling and Personal Development** — [counselling@dcu.ie](mailto:counselling@dcu.ie), 01 700 5165. Email from your DCU student address; they will send you a registration link.
- **DCU Student Advice and Support** — [student.support@dcu.ie](mailto:student.support@dcu.ie). Practical advice on money worries, accommodation, settling in and academic matters. DCU also has an International Student Support Officer you can book an appointment with.
- **DCU Student Health Service** — [healthservices@dcu.ie](mailto:healthservices@dcu.ie), 01 700 5143, Henry Grattan building, room CG13. Nurse appointments are free; a GP appointment is €25.

If you are in crisis, or thinking about harming yourself, please tell someone tonight rather than waiting. In an emergency dial 112 or 999. Samaritans are free on 116 123, and Pieta on 1800 247 247, both 24 hours a day.

*Source: DCU International Academy, IFY Student Handbook 2026–2027. DCU Counselling ([dcu.ie/counselling](https://dcu.ie/counselling)), DCU Student Advice and Support ([dcu.ie/studentsupport](https://dcu.ie/studentsupport)), DCU Student Health Service ([dcu.ie/health](https://dcu.ie/health)), DCU Sport ([dcu.ie/dcusport](https://dcu.ie/dcusport)).  
Checked August 2026.*

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## 11. Where to get help — quick reference

Everything listed here is free to you as a DCUIA student.

### For your programme, your coursework and anything personal

- **DCUIA IFY team** — [ify.academic@dcu.ie](mailto:ify.academic@dcu.ie), 01 700 6413.
- **IFY Teaching Team Coordinator** — Julija Orzechovskaja, [julia.orzechovskaja@dcu.ie](mailto:julia.orzechovskaja@dcu.ie), 01 700 8871
- **IFY Operations Coordinator** — Caron Linehan, [caron.linehan@dcu.ie](mailto:caron.linehan@dcu.ie), 01 700 6737

- **School Coordinator, IFY Academic Support** — Stephanie McGrath, ify.academic@dcu.ie, 01 700 6413
- **Your tutors** — in class, and in clinic and supervised study hours

### For writing, study skills and research

- **DCU Writing Centre** — one-to-one appointments and workshops.  
dcu.ie/studentsupport/build-your-learning-confidence
- **Learning Skills Advisors** — note-taking, reading, time management, presentations, exam preparation. Same page as above.
- **Maths Learning Centre** — free drop-in maths help, ground floor of O'Reilly Library.  
dcu.ie/maths/about-maths-learning-centre
- **DCU Library** — Library Search, databases, referencing help and the LETS tutorial. dcu.ie/library
- **Cite Them Right Online** — referencing formats for every source type, free through DCU Library

### For IT and your accounts

- **DTS Service Desk** — DCU accounts, network, printing, hardware, lost files. dcu.ie/dts
- **DCUIA Learn (Canvas)** — the Student Hub area contains the user guide and “how to” videos

### For your health and wellbeing

- **DCU Student Health Service** — healthservices@dcu.ie, 01 700 5143
- **DCU Counselling** — counselling@dcu.ie, 01 700 5165
- **DCU Student Advice and Support** — student.support@dcu.ie
- **Emergency services** — 112 or 999
- **Samaritans** — 116 123, free, 24 hours
- **Pieta** — 1800 247 247, free, 24 hours

### Write your own notes here

My tutors' names and email addresses: .....

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My module deadlines this semester: .....

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My student number: .....

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## About this guide

This Self-Study Guide was produced by DCU International Academy for students on the International Foundation Year. It is designed to sit alongside your IFY Student Handbook 2026–2027, which contains the full regulations for your programme, and the Life in Dublin guide, which covers living in the city.



## Sources and accuracy

Information about your programme, your assessment, the examination regulations and academic misconduct is taken from the DCU International Academy IFY Student Handbook 2026–2027. Information about DCU services — the library, the Writing Centre, learning skills support, the Maths Learning Centre, DTS, counselling, student advice and health — is taken from Dublin City University's own web pages at [dcu.ie](https://www.dcu.ie) and was checked in August 2026.

Where a study technique or a piece of general academic guidance comes from an external source, that source is named at the end of the relevant section. Services, contact details and fees change during the year, so please confirm current details before you rely on them, and tell the IFY team if anything here is out of date.

## Images

Photographs of DCU and of DCU International Academy students are supplied by Dublin City University. All diagrams, charts and illustrations were created for this publication. Where a photograph has not yet been supplied, a marked placeholder shows the image required and a suggested source.

## Contact

- DCU Glasnevin Campus, Collins Avenue, Dublin 9.  
[ify.academic@dcu.ie](mailto:ify.academic@dcu.ie) | 01 700 6413
- DCU International Academy  
[ug.international@dcu.ie](mailto:ug.international@dcu.ie)