



Commencing Study in Australia

A quick reference guide
for Chinese Students



Murdoch
UNIVERSITY



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

<http://chinapostgraduates.murdoch.edu.au>

Introduction

This **Quick Reference Guide** is designed to provide you with key knowledge about studying in Australia. It provides important, and useful information about five significant areas:

- The Australian university context
- Requirements for you to fully engage in academic life
- Information about how to be successful in your studies
- Information about how your knowledge and work will be assessed
- Advice on how you can get the most out of your time in Australia

Use this **Quick Reference Guide** to build familiarity with your new learning context so that you have some understanding of how Australian universities work and what to expect on arrival.

The Australian university context

Australian universities are not the same as Chinese universities. Here are some key areas of difference:

- Students come from all over the world, and even the Australian students come from many different cultural backgrounds and speak languages in addition to English.
- Most students don't live on campus and if they do, they have to cook for themselves.
- Campuses can seem less busy. There tend to be fewer clubs, associations and sporting groups than in Chinese universities. Students go off campus for most of their social activities. All universities do, however, have taverns and food outlets. These can be a bit expensive but are great places to socialise with other students.
- The university library is a very busy place and it provides access to a huge range of material. Students can source information from a wide variety of media and there are texts and resources from all over the world.
- There will be different sorts of classes such as lectures, seminars, workshops and tutorials. Preparation for these requires lots of reading from a variety of sources. Active participation in classes is expected and is often formally assessed.
- Students are required to do a great deal of work independently. Lecturers and tutors provide guidance but students themselves are expected to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Support for students is available and is commonly accessed by students. Seeking help or support is not considered in a negative way in Australia and does not involve loss of face. No problem is considered too small when seeking help. Help is provided in the following areas:
 - Academic help and advice from Student Support Centres.
 - Academic literacy support and help with English from Student Support Centres.
 - IT support from the university's IT Centre.

- Career and course counselling. Your course, or School, or the university will have someone dedicated to offering advice to students about which units to select as well as advice on future careers. Sometimes the course director is the best person to see for this type of advice.
- Library support from the librarians.
- Health and medical services. There are often doctors on campus for students.
- Counselling and emotional support from the university's counselling services.

Get to know the university

It is really important to prepare yourself for your new university environment. Getting to know your university through its website can make a big difference. Exploring the website will help you know what the university looks like, the facilities that it provides, and also how you can access information and support. Information about clubs and societies, (such as the Chinese Student Association), will also be available through the university website.

Here is an example of an Australian university website:

Overview

- Get Organised
- My First Year
- Study Successfully
- Health and Happiness
- Join in
- Finances
- Rights and Responsibilities

Studying at Murdoch is more than textbooks it's an experience. Use this site to explore the tools, services and support available to you.

[Get started](#)

Top student sites

- [MyMurdoch](#)
- [Get help with IT](#)
- [MyUnits](#)
- [Timetables](#)
- [MyInfo](#)
- [Webmail](#)
- [MyAnswers](#)
- [Library](#)

Events 15

- [Murdoch University and HBF Run for a Reason FREE TRAINING...](#)
March 31st, 2014
- [Murdoch University Exchange Fair](#)
April 3rd, 2014
- [Multicultural Day - A Celebration of Murdoch's Multicultural...](#)
April 10th, 2014
- [Resumes and Cover Letters that Work \(final workshop...](#)
April 10th, 2014

[+ More events](#)

How are you feeling?

Confused, lost or overwhelmed? Just like a mood ring, this useful finder will help you find what you're looking for based on how you're feeling!

[+ Find out more](#)

Postgraduate course finder

Is it time to **TRANSFORM YOUR WORLD?**

Progress your career or inspire a new direction with the help of our online tool.

[+ Find your course](#)

First year at uni

- [Organise your enrolment](#)
- [Your foundation units](#)
- [Academic calendar](#)
- [About O-week](#)
- [Finding you way around](#)
- [Where's the library](#)
- [Where are the computer facilities](#)
- [Adjusting to uni life](#)
- [Get financial help](#)

Uni Life

- [Clubs and societies](#)
- [Sports and recreation](#)
- [Student guild](#)
- [Volunteer opportunities](#)
- [Living at Murdoch](#)
- [Undergrad scholarships](#)
- [Overseas study opportunities](#)
- [Language and Cultural Exchange](#)

It's all about me

- [Changing units](#)
- [Health Services](#)
- [Disability Services](#)
- [Coping with stress](#)
- [Dealing with depression](#)
- [Finding friends](#)
- [Rights and responsibilities](#)

Study and exams

- [About exams](#)
- [Exam timetable](#)
- [Exam help \(pdf format\)](#)
- [About referencing](#)
- [About critical thinking](#)
- [Helpful workshops](#)
- [Time management tips \(pdf format\)](#)
- [Reading tips \(pdf format\)](#)
- [Essay writing tips](#)
- [Academic writing \(pdf format\)](#)
- [Research skills](#)
- [New ways of learning](#)
- [Help with your English](#)

Graduation

- [Graduating this semester](#)
- [Services for graduates](#)
- [Life after graduation](#)

From this one site you can get lots of information about things like:

- Enrolment
- Where everything is
- University life and adjusting to it
- Computing facilities
- Study, timetables and exams
- Different types of support

All you have to do is click on the appropriate link on your university website.

Studying in Australia will be an intense experience

You may find that studying in Australia is harder than you are anticipating. It is likely that there will be more pressure on you than there was during your undergraduate study in China. You will need to do a lot of reading and there will be many assignments that you will have to complete. These will require you to do a lot of writing in English. Be prepared for the fact that initially you may feel a little overwhelmed.

Note

It's really important to use the support services that are provided for you by the university. Whilst it might feel natural and safe for you to rely on other Chinese students, or other international students, they may not be best placed to give you the support and information that you really need. It is much better to speak with university staff whose job it is to help students like you – that's what they are there for. They expect you to contact them so don't let them down.

Although study will be time consuming and intense, it is important for you to realise that you will benefit from making the time to experience life beyond the university. It will be advantageous for you to get to know some Australian students. Experiencing Australian life more fully will help improve your knowledge of, and ability to use English, as well as your knowledge and understanding of Australian society. Returning to China with your knowledge enriched through these experiences will give you extra skills to use in your professional career.

Requirements for you to fully engage in academic life

Here is a list of things that you will need to do to make sure that you engage fully in academic life in Australia:

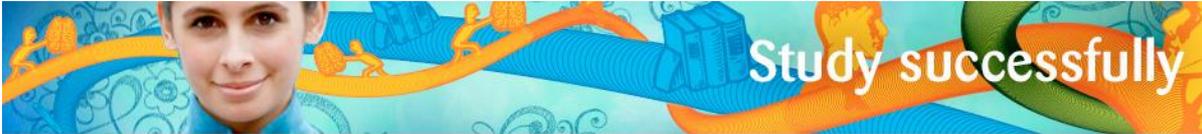
- Learn to use the library
- Get to know your classmates (and not just the Chinese ones)
- Do the required readings (and be very familiar with the contents of the Study Guides for each of your units or courses)
- Develop your English writing skills
- Be prepared to express and debate opinions, ideas and arguments in discussion and in writing
- Don't expect your lecturers to give you all the answers and all the information that you think you need
- Engage with Australian media to broaden your viewpoint and understanding

There are two really important things that you need to do:

- Use English as often as you can - spontaneously and interactively - and with lots of different people, on and off campus
- Understand that attending class and working hard will not be enough. You will need to develop new skills and new ways of learning to support your work in the Australian university environment

Information on how to be successful in your studies

All universities in Australia provide support to help students be successful in their study. In most universities you can access useful information personally from learning support or study skills centers, or through the university website. The image below is taken from a university website and shows links to 'Quick Tips' to help students with their studies.



Study successfully

<p>General elective units</p> <p>Make the most of your study</p> <p>Top 10 quick tips</p> <p>→ Computer help</p> <p>Boosting your academic skills</p> <p>Referencing and citing</p> <p>Online and Print Resources</p> <p>Workshops</p> <p>English as a second language</p> <p>Consultations</p> <p>Seeing someone for help</p> <p>Bridging maths</p> <p>Academic progress</p> <p>OnTrack</p>	<h3>Quick tips</h3> <p>Need help for a new project, presentation or assignment? If you want to know how to plan an essay or write a report, but don't have a lot of time, these Quick tips may be very useful for you.</p> <p>We've created a series of "Top 10 Tips" for a variety of different subjects to help you get the run-down on what you need to know to get started right away.</p> <p>Read the "Top 10" Quick Tips on...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Citing and referencing (pdf format)• Critical thinking (pdf format)• Preparing for examinations (pdf format)• Help with computers• Managing your time (pdf format)• Effective presentations (pdf format)• Reading and notemaking (pdf format)• Doing research (pdf format)• Studying online at Murdoch (pdf format)• Writing in academic english (pdf format)• Essay writing (pdf format)• Writing scientific lab reports (pdf format)
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This particular site gives access to the following:

- [Citing and referencing](#) (pdf format)
- [Critical thinking](#) (pdf format)
- [Preparing for examinations](#) (pdf format)
- [Help with computers](#)
- [Managing your time](#) (pdf format)
- [Effective presentations](#) (pdf format)
- [Reading and notemaking](#) (pdf format)
- [Doing research](#) (pdf format)
- [Studying online at Murdoch](#) (pdf format)
- [Writing in academic english](#) (pdf format)
- [Essay writing](#) (pdf format)
- [Writing scientific lab reports](#) (pdf format)

Information about these areas is important and very useful. There are some other areas, however, that need to be highlighted. These are discussed in the sections below.

The need to be independent

There is a very common expression in English. The phrase 'stand on your own two feet' means 'to be independent'. In Australia, university students are expected to be independent. This means that students themselves (not parents, lecturers or tutors) are responsible for their own learning. It also means that students have to have the confidence to seek assistance, to receive feedback, and then act on that feedback in order to improve and demonstrate learning.

Being independent in this way can be very challenging, especially if you are used to lecturers and tutors giving you the information that you need to pass exams. Students who have studied in Australia often comment on this area. Read the comments below reported from Chinese postgraduate students. These will help you understand what it takes to be successful in your studies in Australia.

Lecturers here [Australia] provide a direction but it is the responsibility of the student to find the way.

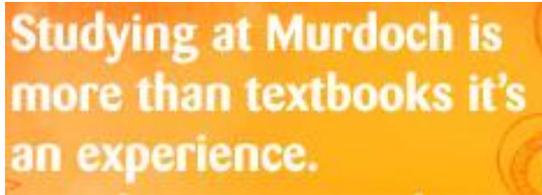
No duck filling and lots of assignments.

'Under the words', it's not just about what is right and wrong

The Chinese phrase *yan xia zhi yi* refers to what is meant by 'under the words'. This concept is important, and you need to bring it with you to Australia. Much of the work that you will do in your new learning context will be about the 'underneath' meanings of what you read and hear. In English we use the phrase 'critical thinking'. This incorporates attending to those underneath meanings and this will be really important

for you in terms of your success in your studies. Postgraduate study in Australia requires you to deal with complex ideas in complex ways. It goes well beyond simple concepts associated with what is right and wrong.

Be prepared to do a lot more reading and writing



This banner is taken from Murdoch University's website. It highlights one of the really important things that you need to be aware of when studying in Australia. You may be used to textbooks being your main source of information for study purposes. In Australia, you will be required to use multiple sources of data, including academic journal articles as well as a range of digital resources. You will need to 'go beyond the textbook'. This means that you will be expected to do a lot more reading before you write and that your writing will be more extensive than you are used to. Textbooks and PowerPoint presentations will not provide you with all the answers that you need to do well in assessments.

[In China] we have far fewer assignments.

In China, do we read much? Not even close. We don't have the habit of reading.

The huge amount of reading [in Australia] requires you to change your study method when studying overseas.

The need to develop new skills and strategies to support your learning

We know that you will work hard but working hard in Australia is not the same as working hard in China. In Australia, you will not be expected to remember vast quantities of information and reproduce it exactly. Instead, you will be asked to engage with a great deal of information that you must critique, evaluate and have an opinion on. This may be different from what you are used to. It will require new study skills and strategies. In all Australian universities, however, there are people whose job it is to help you develop these new study skills so make sure you contact them and use the materials that they provide to help you.

One really important thing that you need to do is follow this advice given by a Chinese student who studied in Australia.

Talk more and make friends with local classmates to better understand the local community and teaching.

Information about how your knowledge and work will be assessed

It is very important to understand that in Australia, examinations are only one part of university assessment. Usually examination scores make up only a small part of your overall mark for a unit or a course. Because of this, working hard to pass examinations will not be enough to get you through your course. You will need to do many different types of assignments and these will all be used to determine your final mark and grade.

It is also important to understand that when undertaking your work, and completing assignments, you will need to be very mindful of the specific criteria that your lecturers set in order to judge the quality of your work. These criteria will be clearly stated in your Study Guide which is a booklet given out to every student with details about the unit they are studying. You need to use your Study Guides to guide you as you research, plan, and then complete your assignments. Here are some examples of criteria that might be used to assess an essay:

- Demonstrates a sound understanding of key concepts and ideas.
- Critically analyses the readings by contrasting, critiquing and clarifying multiple points of view.
- Presents a coherent and persuasive argument.
- Is well written, using language that adheres to standards of academic writing.

Criteria such as these provide you with a useful guide for how to write your assignment because they indicate what a lecturer is looking for when he or she marks your work.

It is also important to understand that, in order to improve your work, you need to take notice of the feedback that your lecturers and tutors provide. Lecturers' comments indicate how they judge your work against the benchmark of the assignment criteria. By taking note of these comments, you will develop your writing skills and do better in your next assignment.

How to get the most out of your time in Australia

Here are some important tips for you:

- Before you leave China make sure that you take the opportunity to experience real English. Use the Internet to access things like movies and songs so that you can acclimatise yourself to the rate of speech, to different accents, to informal and formal language use, and importantly, to aspects of the new culture that you are going to be living in. If you do this, when you are actually in Australia, things will not seem so unfamiliar.
- Be proactive – academically and socially. Don't be shy and don't worry about face. You need to take the opportunity to experience as much as you can within this different community.

- Make sure you connect with people who speak English as their first language. You have a lot that you can learn from them and they have a lot that they can learn from you.
- Make sure that you get involved in activities that happen outside of the university. Consider joining a sporting club or some other group that will help you experience Australian culture more broadly.

And take note of this advice provided by a Chinese academic recalling his experiences of studying overseas.

Don't be afraid of behaving silly in another cultural context, be positive and be active, embrace the shock and the difference, which are exactly why we go there.

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'Collaborating for Success: Enhancing the Transition of
Chinese students into Australian postgraduate education'

Additional materials and resources are available from
<http://chinapostgraduates.murdoch.edu.au>

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