As well as being exciting, beginning university can be challenging for any new student: organising your time and juggling commitments; finding the best methods for integrating, retaining and applying new knowledge; understanding and complying with university expectations; and finding your way through the maze of resources and buildings. Mature-aged students can have additional challenges:

- You may initially feel alone or awkward amongst younger students
- You may have additional family and demands upon your time
- You may have additional financial demands
- Things may have changed in the world of study since your last visit.

Here are some general tips to get you started:

**1. SET REALISTIC GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS**

Reminding yourself why you are here is important. Your tutors have learning goals for you, but what are your own? What steps do you need to take to achieve them? Knowing this can help keep you motivated and on-track. Keep your goals realistic and achievable: nothing kills motivation faster than continually setting goals you cannot meet: you are then more likely to become discouraged and maybe even give up. Know your strengths as well as your challenges, and remember that as well as a student you are also a person with strengths in other areas such sports, hobbies, parenting, or friendship. This can keep you going during the more demanding times.

**2. REWARD YOURSELF**

Notice every small achievement and reward yourself, in both big and small ways. Small achievements, like finishing reading an article, may lead to a pat on the back. Larger achievements, such as passing the year, may require a party, or a dinner with friends. Finishing an essay may justify going to a movie. Plan rewards into your study: “I will work on my essay this morning then meet a friend for lunch.” Share your achievements with people close to you, and celebrate important milestones.

**3. BUILD A SUPPORT NETWORK**

Levels of support for mature age students from existing friends and families can vary widely. Some families are hugely supportive, while others may actively resent their family member’s new focus of attention. Most families fall somewhere in between. Get to know who will be your cheering squad, and who will support you if there are times when you feel overwhelmed and/or discouraged. Additionally, find a buddy at university and build an on-campus support network. Even if your family is hugely supportive, you will find it invaluable to have someone to talk to who knows and understands the university experience. If you are not on campus that much, or feel uncomfortable amongst younger classmates (who may already have friends) there are a range of ways you can meet other potentially like-minded students from joining a club (including the mature-age students club), and attending seminars and workshops. There are a few contacts below.
4. DEVELOP STUDY METHODS THAT MINIMISE STRESS AND MAXIMISE BENEFIT

The ways in which you study can have a huge impact on how you integrate and retain new knowledge.

- Prioritise tasks. Be ruthless! Sometimes you will need to spend less time on a task than you would like.
- Study smarter, not longer. A certain amount of time will be necessary, but if your study method is inefficient, more time will not necessarily mean more learning.
- “Input” is only one stage of the learning task. You also need to practice remembering.
- When reading, ask yourself at the end of each paragraph or page, “What was that about?” Answer yourself in your own words. If you haven’t understood re-read, and look up words you don’t know.
- Find an efficient way of taking notes. Instead of writing everything, write important details in your own words. It may take a little longer, but you will remember better and save time in the long term. Some suggestions for note-taking are available on the Return to Study section of TLC’s Blackboard.
- Engage with the material in other ways: ask questions, relate information from one source to another.
  E.g. “This reading is saying something similar to what the lecturer said, but in different words.”
- Don’t panic about plagiarism, but learn how to paraphrase, summarise, synthesise, quote, and reference. There is help available through TLC and at the Library. You are permitted time to learn.

5. WORK OUT A TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGY THAT WORKS FOR YOU

Most advice on time-management involves carving up your days weeks and months into blocks of time and filling the blocks with tasks. For university, a semester planner can help you keep track of assignments and exams, and plan out the tasks involved, as well as cross reference the busy times with any other large demands on your time. A weekly planner then allows you to mark in your lectures and tutorials, any work or family responsibilities, and then fit in your various study tasks. Most importantly, however you manage time needs to work for you. Some ideas:

a. Combine study and other activities. E.g. arrive an hour early to a coffee appointment and read
b. If you have school-age children, have a “family study time” before dinner
c. Plan in fun as well as work or you may not stick to the schedule.

6. GET TO KNOW SERVICES ON CAMPUS

- Childcare: http://unilife.curtin.edu.au/housing_childcare/Childcare.htm
- Mature-Age Student Club (Guild) mature@guild.curtin.edu.au
- Library workshops http://bookings.library.curtin.edu.au/
- The library online referencing guides http://libguides.library.curtin.edu.au/content.php?pid=141214
- Counselling http://unilife.curtin.edu.au/health_wellbeing/counselling_services.htm
- Health Services http://unilife.curtin.edu.au/health_wellbeing/HoursLocation.htm 08 9266 7345
- START Mentoring Program http://mentoring.curtin.edu.au/

SOME MORE TIPS FOR MATURE-AGED STUDENTS: