

The Art of Re-Entry

Going Back to School as an Older Student

If you're returning to school after a long break from the classroom, there's no reason to feel out of place. Returning adults and other nontraditional students are already a majority in some schools.

Being an older student puts you on strong footing. With a rich store of life experience, you can ask questions and make connections between course work and daily life. Many instructors will especially enjoy working with you.

Following are some suggestions for returning adult students. Even if you don't fit in this category, you can look for ways to apply these ideas.

Ease into it

If you're new to higher education, consider easing into it. Go to school part-time before making a full-time commitment.

Plan your week

Many older students report that their number one problem is time. One solution is to plan your week. By planning a week at a time instead of just one day, you get a bigger picture of your roles as student, employee, and family member. For many more suggestions on managing time, see Study Skills Tip Sheets online or at B 214.

Delegate tasks

Consider hiring others to do some of your household work or errands. Yes, this costs money. It's also an investment in your education and future earning power.

If you do have children, delegate some of the chores to them. Or, start a meal co-op in your neighbourhood. Cook dinner for yourself and someone else one night each week. In return, ask that person to furnish you with a meal on another night. A similar strategy can apply to childcare and other household tasks.

Add 15 minutes to your day

If you're pressed for time, get up 15 minutes earlier or stay up 15 minutes later. Chances are the lost sleep won't affect your alertness during the day.

Meanwhile, you can use the extra time to scan a reading assignment or outline a paper. Stretching each day by just 15 minutes yields 91 extra hours in a year. That's time you can use to promote your success in school.

Get to know younger students

You share a central concern with younger students: succeeding in school. It's easier to get past the generation gap when you remember this. Consider pooling resources with younger students. Share notes, form study groups, or edit each other's term papers.

Get to know other returning students

Introduce yourself to other older students. Being in the same classroom gives you an immediate bond. You can exchange work and home phone numbers with these people. Build a network of mutual support. Some students even adopt a buddy system, pairing up with another student in each class to complete assignments and prepare for tests.

Find common ground with instructors

Many of the people who teach your classes may be juggling academics, work, and family lives too. That gives you one more way to break the ice with instructors.

Enlist your employer's support

Employers often promote continuing education. Further education can increase your skills either in a specific subject or in working with people. That makes you a more valuable employee or consultant.

Let your employer in on the plan. Point out how the skills you gain in class will help you meet work objectives. Or offer informal "seminars" to share what you're learning in school.

Get extra mileage out of your current tasks

You can look for specific ways to merge your work and school lives. Some schools will offer academic credit for work and life experience. Likewise, your company may reimburse employees for some tuition costs or even grant time off to attend classes.

Experiment with combining tasks. For example, when you're assigned a research paper, choose a topic that relates to your current job tasks.

Look for child care

For some students, returning to class means looking for child care outside the home. Many schools offer child care at school for reduced rates for students.

Review your subjects before you start classes

Say that you're registered for trigonometry and you haven't taken a math class since high school. Then consider brushing up on the subject before classes begin. Also talk to future instructors about ways to prepare for their classes.

Prepare for an academic environment

If you're used to an efficient corporate setting, school life may present some frustrations. A lack of advanced computer systems may slow down your class registration. Faculty members may take a little longer to return your calls or respond to letters, especially during holiday and summer breaks. Knowing the rhythm of academic life can help you plan around these events.

Be willing to let go of old images about how to study

Many older students find it effective to view their school assignments exactly as they would view a project at work. They use the same tactics in the library as on the job, which often helps them learn more actively.

"Publish" your schedule

After you plan your study and class sessions for the week, post your schedule in a place where others will see it. You can treat this as a game. Make your schedule look like an "official" document. Designate open slots in your schedule where others can sign up for "appointments" to see you.

Share your educational plans

The fact that you're in school will affect the key relationships in our life. Committing to classes and studying may prompt feelings of guilt about taking time away from others. You can prevent problems by discussing these issues ahead of time.

Another strategy is to actively involve your spouse, partner, or close friends in your schooling. Offer to

give them a tour of the school and introduce them to your instructors.

Take this a step further and ask the key people in your life for help. Ask them to think of ways they can support your success in school and to commit to those actions. Make education a joint mission that benefits you.

Want more information?

The Counselling Department and the Academic Success Centre are your best sources for advice and information on issues related to learning, studying, time management, and academic performance.

Workshops on learning, studying, etc., are offered regularly each semester by the Counselling Department. Please contact Student Services at Abbotsford – 604-854-4528 (B 214) or Chilliwack – 604-795-2808 (A 1318) to make an appointment.

Study Skills Tip Sheets providing information on many learning and time management topics, as well as writing and referencing are available free to students. The complete range of Study Skills Tip Sheets is available on-line at www.ufv.ca/counselling/study/.

Relevant Study Skills Tip Sheets:

Effective Time Planning
Making Time Management Work for You
Top 40 Study Strategies
... and more on-line

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