

1. Introduction

The first chapter introduces the academic environment, university study and its general organisation. We will discuss how university students are expected to work, what particular qualities are seen as desirable, and which fundamental values students should embrace. We will also give a few useful tips as regards communication with your teachers and other members of staff.

Study material

1 Introduction

1.1 The academic environment

The academic world is in many ways different from the study environment at the lower levels of education. This means that the learning experience and working habits you have acquired during your primary and secondary school studies do not fully translate into the requirements and expectations of the university. For the unprepared, some of the differences may even come as a sort of “culture shock”.

Coming out of secondary school you will soon have to get used to the following key differences:

1.1.1 University study

At the university level, studies are organised into **degree programmes**, as part of which you study various courses. Similar to most European countries, universities in the Czech Republic have adopted what is referred to as the **credit system**. This means that your academic performance will be measured not only in traditional course marks but also in **credits**, points that you receive for completing each course. The actual credit value of a course is determined by the particular degree programme.

A typical degree programme consists of:

- required courses (mandatory for all students in the programme),
- required optional courses (you have to take a certain number of courses choosing from a given list),
- optional courses (you can study these if you are interested in them).

It is your responsibility to enrol in all the necessary courses and to organise your study efforts in such a way that you acquire the prescribed number of credits to present at the end of your final year. (Taking up one extra course just to be on the safe side certainly does not hurt.)

1.1.2 Expectations

A much greater degree of **independence and self-direction** is expected on the part of the university student. You will keep receiving instructions from your teachers but in many of the assigned tasks you will have to demonstrate a pro-active approach, initiative, and self-reliance.

A typical university course takes the form of a **lecture** (a more teacher-centred lesson format based on presentation and with limited student participation) or a **seminar** (based on class discussion, [task](#) solving and group work). In both, it is assumed that students will take notes independently and as they find appropriate/useful. Do not wait for your teacher to tell you which particular piece of information is important and should be taken down.

In comparison with the secondary level, university teachers act more like **facilitators or guides** taking you through the learning process. Listen to what they have to say but do not expect the information given in the classroom to be the only information required to pass your exams.

There are comparably **fewer hours of in-class teaching**, and much more time is devoted to completing homework assignments and reading. These activities make an inherent part of your study just like the in-class sessions, so it does not pay to cut corners.

The **library** will become your regular hangout. Early on in your studies, make sure that you take a tour of the university library: most departments organise such a tour for their first-year students. Learn how to use the library catalogue effectively in order to make the most of the resources available to you.

Remember that you, and only you, are responsible for your study performance and results.

1.1.3 Contact and communication

In general, there is **less personal contact** with your teachers and tutors. Outside classroom time they often hold office hours each week for students to come and ask questions or get feedback. External or visiting members of staff may require you to make a prior appointment.

Some of the courses may be taught using a Learning Management System (LMS), which is a modern-day, web-based form of **distance learning**. In such a setting there is even less direct contact between the teacher and his or her students. Course participants are assigned reading, exercises and tasks to do using the LMS (such as Moodle or another **e-learning** system).

Advantages of online learning include flexibility in choosing the time and place of study, meaning that such a course can be easily combined with other activities or work. On the other hand, as the actual amount of content is comparable to regularly taught, in-class courses, you will have to establish and stick to a good learning plan so as to complete your tasks, assignments and tests in due time. Another disadvantage of e-learning is the relatively limited feedback you get on your coursework (unless the LMS course is complemented with tutored in-class sessions; this form of study is referred to as **blended learning**).

A good deal of communication at the university takes place via **e-mail**. Upon enrolling in their degree programme, students are given a dedicated university e-mail address, which they are required to check regularly. Remember that apart from in-class communication, e-mail is the only way for your teacher to reach you, so make sure you visit your inbox often. Some information may be given at a relatively short notice.

If you e-mail your teachers or any other members of staff, do so only from your university e-mail account. Write in a professional, polite style, and remember to use an appropriate

greeting and sign-off in all mails. When sending your coursework in an attachment, always include a message: never leave the body of the e-mail empty, this feels extremely rude!

University staff will not normally reply to e-mails outside of standard office hours. This means that you should not expect a reply to your e-mail in the evenings, at the weekend, or during holidays.

It is not common that teachers and tutors communicate with their students using **social media**, so trying to befriend your teacher on Facebook is not the kind of initiative that is expected of you. However, individual university departments or institutes often establish their official social media presence (such as a Facebook page) to ease the dissemination of information. Feel free to join in to get the latest news and announcements.

Comprehension check

1. What is the difference between a *required*, a *required optional*, and an *optional* course?
2. What is the difference between a *lecture* and a *seminar*?
3. What is the difference between *e-learning* and *blended-learning*?

Task

Visit your department's website, locate the section related to your particular degree programme, and have a look at the current list of courses.

- Which required courses will you have to take in your first year?
- Which required optional courses are on offer?
- Will you be able to also choose any optional courses?

2. Organising your studies

This chapter explains why it is a good idea to keep your study efforts organised and focused, and outlines how to go about it. We will discuss time as a factor contributing to stress, introduce the basic principles of time management, and identify common “time eaters” that represent a major hindrance to using one's time effectively. We will also mention how time-planning tools can help organise your life at the university.

Study material

2 Organising your studies

2.1 Why get organised?

Some people are natural-born students. They clearly demonstrate a devotion to learning, they learn fast, and things seem to come to them as if by a sixth sense or a special power. In reality,

however, such students are quite rare. Many young people enter the university unprepared for the challenges and expectations that we have outlined in the introductory chapter.

As a result, more often than not they find themselves under considerable stress or in a state of despair resulting from the many pressures of the academic environment. Common university **stressors** include:

- lack of time,
- feeling of inadequacy,
- fear of failure,
- academic overload,
- in-class competition,
- bad relationships with staff or fellow students,
- homesickness,
- financial problems.

In order to prevent falling under stress, it is necessary to get organised!

2.2 Time management basics

Time is an important factor for human beings. A lot of stress in life originates from a perceived lack of time; in fact, some of the “academic stressors” mentioned above are more related to time than to anything else. For example, the feeling of overload in students often comes from poor time planning rather than from getting too much work to do. Also, students are afraid of failure not because they are slow-witted but because they feel that they have not spent enough time preparing for exams.

In this [study material](#) we will give you a few general tips how to organise your time at the university. If you want to delve deeper, we encourage you to read one of the many books on time management and planning. The bibliography at the end of this material will be your guide.

2.2.1 Time eaters

The first thing you should do is identify your **time eaters**: things that waste your time, destroy your productivity, slow down your progress, and deprive you of energy for work or study. While it is true that people often mention the same time eaters when asked, the actual degree to which they consume one’s precious time can be highly individual. Some obvious time eaters include:

- **social networks** (how many times have you taken a break to read something on Facebook, only to find yourself still scrolling through the news feed an hour later?)
- **computer games** (they can be extremely immersive: some people apparently play them for days, if not weeks on end)
- **web surfing** (it’s easy to lose your sense of time on the Internet: imagine visiting a street market that has *everything!*)

- the **television** (despite losing a lot of ground in recent years due to pressure from new media, some people still consider flipping between 100 channels a pastime worth their while)
- **commuting** (we regularly waste considerable amounts of time on our way to work or school)

Some time eaters are less conspicuous, and people often do not realize they might cause a problem:

- lack of self-discipline
- lack of priorities
- aimlessness, lack of plan
- inability to say no

2.2.2 Time-planning tools

We live in an information age: we produce, look for, and consume information every day. In such a setting it has become obvious that the human brain – highly sophisticated as it may be – is no longer capable of absorbing so much information. Many people are unable to remember the birthdays of their nearest and dearest, let alone the dates of their appointments, exams, and deadlines.

Apart from the learning content, university studies impose on you a great number of dates and times to remember. It is highly recommended that you use a modern tool to keep track of your assignments, tasks, submission deadlines, exam dates, and other events. A traditional diary is not very suitable, not because it would quite likely look uncool to your fellow students but because it would become yet another thing to put in your bag. What you need is a software application that runs on your smartphone, tablet, or laptop: something you carry with you every day.

Applications designed to organise your working life are referred to as **personal information managers** (PIMs). They very often take the form of integrated solutions that include:

- an **e-mail client** (which you can configure to use your personal as well as your university e-mail account from a single place);
- a **to-do list** (to keep track of tasks to complete within a specific time);
- a **calendar** (for various events: regular or irregular);
- a **contact manager** (to store and edit your contacts).

Popular PIM solutions include Microsoft Outlook, Mozilla Thunderbird (with the Lightning extension), EssentialPIM, and Google Calendar.

2.2.3 The bigger picture

Do not live for the day: always have a good **overview** of the things to come in your university life!

Early on in your first year, have a look at the full curriculum for your degree programme to see how many courses you will have to take each semester. It is likely that the first few semesters will be quite busy, with some heavy lifting to be done in courses that represent the core of your programme. Do not slacken your efforts until you have the main, required courses off your back.

At the beginning of each academic year, download or pick up a copy of your faculty's calendar to see how the year is going to be organised. Transfer all important dates and deadlines into your PIM application.

At some point you may be given the opportunity to study abroad as part of a student exchange programme (such as Erasmus+). If you consider spending a semester or even a full year on such a programme, make sure that your stay abroad does not complicate your studies at home.

2.2.4 Operational planning

During the semester, keep your PIM busy. Inform it of all your study obligations: tests, papers, projects, readings, coursework submission deadlines, and exams. Also make plans for holidays, breaks, part-time jobs, etc.

Make sure that you set **reminders** for all key deadlines and events. This way the PIM application will keep nagging you that an important date is approaching.

It can get very frustrating when there is a lot of work to do within a relatively short time frame. Go through the individual tasks and give them **priorities**, starting from the most pressing or difficult ones. These are the tasks to start with.

More heads are better than one. With your fellow students, establish a way to inform each other about important school matters. A good idea is to set up a closed group on social media (such as Facebook) to remind the members of assignments and upcoming deadlines.

Comprehension check

1. In what way does *time* work as a factor contributing to stress? Give more than one example.
2. Can you name three common *time eaters* that are not related to technology?
3. Where will you find information about the organisation of the academic year at your university?

Task

Determine how many hours **a week** you spend doing the following activities:

Activity	Hours spent weekly
Sleeping and relaxation	

Personal care
Shopping
Meal preparation & eating
Socializing, visiting people
Online communication, using social media
Watching TV or videos
Computer games / other hobbies
Sports & exercise
Commuting to school
Part-time work
In-class and online learning
Doing homework, reading for school

- Which of the activities take up the most of your time?
- Do they bring any real benefit to your life and study, or have you just identified some of your potential time eaters?

3. Learning effectively

In this chapter we will have a look at how to boost your studies and improve your learning. Based on the concept of generalised learning styles we will recommend techniques for various types of learner. We will also devote our attention to note-taking as a way to make the most of your lessons and reading. Last but not least, we will recommend a number of resources that a university student of English will surely find useful.

Study material

3 Learning effectively

3.1 Learning styles

The key factor influencing the efficiency and effectiveness of learning is *how* people learn, rather than *how much* time and effort they devote to learning or *how often* they sit down to study.

Different people learn in different ways: what works for one student does not necessarily have to work well for others. The methods, strategies and preferences that a person consistently applies in acquiring knowledge, experience and skills constitute his or her **learning style**.

One traditional classification of learning styles is based on the degree to which the individual human **senses** participate in acquiring information and experience. From the viewpoint of this classification, there exist three types of learning (and consequently, three types of learner): **visual**, **auditory**, and **kinaesthetic**.

3.1.1 Visual learning

Visual learners learn best when information is presented to them in the form of written language (**verbal visual learning**) or in picture form (**non-verbal visual learning**). In educational contexts, visual learners typically benefit from:

- teachers who use the whiteboard or slide presentations to list the main points of their lecture;
- teachers who make a regular use of visual aids such as film, video, photos, pictures, maps, diagrams and charts;
- information and visual material in textbooks;
- class notes;
- their ability to establish mental connections between ideas/concepts and colours;
- their ability to picture things in their mind's eye.

If you know that you are a predominantly visual learner, try adopting some of the following methods and strategies to improve your studying performance:

- Get into the habit of **taking notes** from your classes and reading. If you use note-taking software, bring it to its full potential as regards text styling and formatting.
- Develop your own system of **colour coding**: highlight information of a particular kind in a particular colour. Use highlighter pens or coloured pencils.
- Write key words and important concepts on **sticky notes**, and put them in places that you regularly set your eyes on.
- Prefer studying alone in a quiet room.

3.1.2 Auditory learning

Auditory learners learn best when information is presented to them in the form of **spoken language**. In educational contexts, auditory learners typically benefit from:

- teachers who are experienced, impressive speakers;
- lectures and oral presentations;
- group discussions;
- talking to others in order to check understanding;
- educational radio programmes, podcasts, and audiobooks.

If you know that you are a predominantly auditory learner, try adopting some of the following methods and strategies to improve your studying performance:

- Find a fellow student to regularly discuss class material and prepare for exams together.
- When preparing for your seminars and revising for exams, read your textbook and class notes out loud. (That of course means you need to find a room where you won't be bothering anyone.)
- Ask your teachers if you can make an audio recording of their lectures, using your smartphone. (Most teachers will be fine with that but you really need to ask for permission first.)
- Complement traditional reading with listening to audiobooks. Go through your reading list and see which items are available in audiobook form. Download them into your smartphone or MP3 player so that you can make a convenient use of "dead time" when you walk or commute to school.

3.1.3 Kinaesthetic learning

Kinaesthetic (also referred to as **tactile**) learners learn best when they are **physically engaged** in activities; they "learn by doing". In educational contexts, kinaesthetic learners typically benefit from:

- lessons that provide "hands-on" experience;
- teachers who encourage in-class demonstrations;
- simulations, role-play and other experiential techniques;
- field research outside the classroom;
- using learning equipment and manipulating study materials.

If you know that you are a predominantly kinaesthetic learner, try adopting some of the following methods and strategies to improve your studying performance:

- Think about how you could make your learning tangible: use something you can put your hands on, for example cards, pictures, worksheets, grammar reference charts etc.
- Do your research in the library, do not borrow books to take home. Take a book from the shelf, do your reading, take notes, and return the book to the shelf.
- Take opportunities to do research in the field. Visit museums, writers' homes, locations in which books on your reading list take place, etc.
- Use a computer or tablet to reinforce learning through the sense of touch.

Should you need to skip classes due to time pressure, prefer to sacrifice a lecture rather than a seminar, as seminars tend to be more interactive and present much greater opportunity for your involvement.

3.2 Note-taking

Taking notes is an important part of the learning process, regardless of the type of school. There are several reasons why you should take notes from your lectures, seminars, and reading.

First of all, notes provide a simple and useful way to record information, and as such they **help your memory**. Considering the typical reading list of a student of English, much of your reading would quite likely be wasted without effective note-taking because the amount of information is simply overwhelming. Second, taking notes **helps understanding** because in order to write something meaningful, you need to interpret and understand what you read or hear. Last but not least, taking notes **helps your writing** because good notes can become solid building blocks to use in writing your essays or final thesis.

3.2.1 What do we take notes of?

Note taking can be highly individual but there are some general things we commonly take down:

- **main** (i.e. the most interesting, helpful or inspiring) **ideas**
- **key words or phrases** (these tend to be relatively easy to identify because they reoccur in the text, or – in case you take notes of a lecture – they are repeatedly mentioned in the teacher’s presentation)
- **names** of people, **places**, **dates**, etc. (when taking notes from your reading, don’t forget the main characters, story locations, narration timeline, etc.)
- **quotations** (remember to also take down the respective page number!)
- images, diagrams or other **useful visuals**

But remember that you are a student, not a tape recorder or a secretary! You need to distil the source material into a **practical gist**. There is no point in copying out large chunks of text, unless you are going to quote them directly.

Try to **find a balance**. If you write down too much, chances are that you will *get bogged down* in unnecessary detail and your notes will lose focus. If you write down too little, your notes will be sketchy and you won’t be able to make full use of them.

3.2.2 Organising your notes

Remember the Second Law of Thermodynamics: ”All systems tend toward disorder.“ Your notes are no exception, therefore you will need to impose some kind of order upon them.

Take notes with a view to (re)using them in your written assignments and other coursework. Choose a filing system that works for you. Taking handwritten notes in a **notebook** is fine for keeping a record of in-class lectures and seminars, but if your notes are supposed to serve later as building material for an essay or a thesis (typically: notes from your reading and research), you really want to go for an electronic form. Retyping notes from the notebook pages into a text editor is very impractical: it means extra work, and is prone to spelling errors and omissions.

Keeping notes in an **electronic document**, or in several documents stored on your computer's hard drive, is a better solution (the notes can then be easily copied and pasted), but there, too, are a few inherent drawbacks. First of all, the document can grow very long, as a result of which you may lose track of what you have in there. Storing notes across several documents can help prevent the excessive length problem, but only at the cost of complicating information search and retrieval: you may need to open and search through several files to find the information you are looking for.

If you really want to collect, access and manipulate your notes efficiently, you will have to go for a **dedicated note-taking application** to use on your laptop, tablet or smartphone.

3.2.3 Note-taking applications

Note-taking applications help you keep track of where everything is. Regardless of the actual implementation, device or operating system they run on, these applications are built on the following principles:

- **Free-form information gathering.** You can store text, freehand drawings, photos, screenshots, audio and video recordings, and even entire web pages (saved as offline content).
- **Non-linear note taking.** Notes can be organised hierarchically, and hypertext links can be established between them even if the notes are kept as separate items.
- **Rich text formatting.** Notes can be formatted using text styles (bold, italic, underlined, highlighted), bullet points, numbered lists etc.
- **Cloud-based storage.** Notes are not stored locally on your device but rather “in the cloud”, i.e. in a remote data repository that the application accesses over the Internet. Notes can still be taken offline, without a working Internet connection; as soon as the device comes back online, the local data gets synchronised with the existing data in the cloud. Cloud storage also means that your notes are fully backed up: better safe than sorry!
- **Tagging.** Each note can be assigned one or more tags or keywords, which means that information can easily be searched for using various criteria, and quickly retrieved.

Popular note-taking solutions include Evernote (www.evernote.com) and Microsoft OneNote (available from the Microsoft Store, or as part of the Microsoft Office suite). Download them for your device and try them out!

Fig. 1 – Evernote showing a note consisting of formatted text and graphics.

3.3 Useful study resources

In this section we will introduce and recommend several resources (both printed and electronic) that a student of English may find useful in his/her study, research, writing, and exam preparation. Visit your library to see which of these resources are available to you.

Dictionaries	
	Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD) Oxford University Press, 2015 9th edition A free online version of this dictionary is available at www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com
	Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's Dictionary 9th edition HarperCollins Publishers, 2018 Other Collins dictionaries can be used online at www.collinsdictionary.com
	Lexicon 7 Velký slovník anglicko český/česko anglický Lingea, 2019

	An electronic dictionary (software application) available for the Windows, Linux and MacOS operating systems.
Grammar reference	
	Practical English Usage Michael Swan Oxford University Press, 2016 4th edition
	Grammar for English Language Teachers Martin Parrott Cambridge University Press, 2010 2nd edition
Grammar practice	
	English Grammar in Use Raymond Murphy Cambridge University Press, 2019 5th edition
	Oxford Practice Grammar: Advanced George Yule Oxford University Press, 2019 2nd edition
Vocabulary practice	
	English Vocabulary in Use: Advanced Michael McCarthy, Felicity O'Dell Cambridge University Press, 2017 3rd edition
	Business English Vocabulary in Use: Advanced Bill Mascull Cambridge University Press, 2017 3rd edition
Testing	

	<p>Test It, Fix It</p> <p>Kenna Bourke, Amanda Maris</p> <p>Multi-level book series by Oxford University Press. Covers various areas including vocabulary, grammar, use of English, FCE exam preparation, and business English.</p>
	<p>Test Your...</p> <p>Peter Watcyn-Jones and other authors</p> <p>Multi-level book series by Penguin. Covers various areas including vocabulary, grammar, use of English, reading, FCE exam preparation, and professional English.</p>
Research	
	<p>When searching for academic material to use in your research and writing, prefer to use the Google Scholar search engine (scholar.google.com). Unlike the regular Google engine, the Scholar is specifically designed to find scholarly material such as journal articles or book reviews.</p>
	<p>JSTOR (www.jstor.org) is the No. 1 repository of research material, covering numerous academic journals across various fields. It works based on paid subscription but most universities provide free access for their students and teachers.</p>

Comprehension check

1. What is the difference between *visual*, *auditory* and *kinaesthetic* learning?
2. How can *colours* be utilized to improve the study performance of visual learners? Think of a few specific examples.
3. What can a predominantly kinaesthetic learner do to make his/her studies more “tactile” and experiential? Think of a few specific examples.

Task

Visit the university library and using one of its computers, locate the JSTOR repository at www.jstor.org. In the search box on the main page, type in the key phrase “**business English**” (including the quotation marks).

- How many articles dealing with business English has JSTOR found for you?

Quiz: Learning style assessment

K otevření dané adresy klikněte na odkaz <https://www.how-to-study.com/learning-style-assessment/>

[Note-taking: further reading](#)

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Note-taking>

4. From reading to research

The last chapter will be your guide to the activity that takes up an important part of university studies: research. We will focus on critical reading and thinking as prerequisites for critical writing, which is at the core of research in the arts and humanities. We will give a few tips to help you get started with your writing assignments, using reading material as a starting point and reference. We will also discuss research ethics, specifically focusing on the problem of plagiarism.

Study material

4 From reading to research

4.1 What is research?

Research is an inherent part of academic work; in fact, it constitutes a significant portion of what we do at the university. The word *research* has strong scientific connotations: most people will picture laboratories, experiments and high-tech equipment in their minds. But what kind of research takes place in the arts and humanities? And more specifically, what kind of research will you be expected to do as a student of English?

In a general sense, **research is**:

- a contribution to knowledge;
- a contribution to critical debate;
- an objective re-evaluation of what we already know;
- an investigation of our own critical practices.

As a student of English enrolled in a university degree programme, sooner or later you will find yourself engaged in the following particular types of research activity:

- doing your coursework assignments;
- writing essays;

· writing your final thesis.

4.1.1 Key research skills

In order to meet the academic standards and requirements, you will need to develop and make use of three key **research skills**: critical reading, critical thinking and critical writing. Most typically, we apply critical reading and thinking to arrive at critical writing.

Fig. 2 – Key research skills.

4.2 Reading critically

Studying English at the university involves a good deal of reading: depending on the particular degree programme, the list of required or [recommended reading](#) can be quite long. Daunting as it may look at the first sight, reading is actually something that provides you with useful material for your research. Yes – a lot of research in the arts and humanities is based on reading somebody else’s works!

In order to turn your reading experience into research material you need to start reading critically. Let’s now have a look at the main differences between **critical** and **non-critical** reading:

Non-critical reading	Critical reading
for information, enjoyment, relaxation	for information, opinions, arguments
passive, superficial	active, analytical
focuses mainly on what the text says	focuses also on how and why the text says it, where the text comes from, and who wrote it
tends to accept the argument or fact	tends to evaluate and sometimes even challenge the validity of the argument or fact
has a tendency to believe	has a tendency to be sceptical

does not consider it necessary to take down notes	encourages and sees particular benefit in note-taking
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4.2.1 How to become a critical reader?

When evaluating the quality – i.e. the validity, strength and relevance – of the information gathered from your reading, try to apply the following steps in order to arrive at a more critical and objective assessment:

1. Think about the **source** of the information. Does it come from:

- a **print book**? If so, who is the publisher? Have they established any reputation in the publishing world? Do they sell internationally?

- a **magazine**? What kind? Does it aim at the serious reader? Or does it have flashy graphics and many photos, hinting at being more lifestyle-oriented?

- a **scholarly journal**? Is it peer-reviewed? Does it have an international editorial board? Do its articles appear on JSTOR (see chapter 3.3)?

- an **Internet website or a blog**? Does it have good reputation? Who are the contributors? Do they sign their articles using their real names, or do they hide behind nicknames?

2. Think about the **author** of the text.

- Who is he/she? Is the author well known? Has he/she established any **reputation** in the particular field?

- Where does the author publish his/her work? Remember that serious authors tend to cooperate with serious media and publishers.

- Does the author work for or cooperate with an established institution?

- In what kind of relation is the author with the subject matter of the text?

3. Think about the **function** of the text. Does it primarily try to:

- provide information and present facts?

- analyse or compare?

- persuade, promote, manipulate?

- entertain?

4. Think about how the **argument** is built in the text:

- Is the text logical, well-structured, and generally **convincing**?

- Is it **clear** what the main points and central claims are?
- How does the author support his/her claims? Does he/she provide any **evidence** and/or **examples**?
- Does the author **engage** with or refer to other authors and texts? Does he/she use any citations and/or references?
- Do any other sources **confirm** or interact with what the text says?

5. Think about possible **bias** in the text.

- Does it appear to promote ideas with a noticeable political, social, national, racial etc. bias?
- Does it demonstrate **personal bias** by using, for example, *ad hominem* arguments (i.e. arguments attacking another person's character rather than challenging their ideas)? Does the author appear to treat other people as enemies rather than intellectual opponents?
- Does the text feel **ego-centric**?
- Does the author appear to have a **hidden agenda**, concealing his/her real intentions beneath substitute argumentation or topic?
- Does the text appear to be influenced by **nostalgia**, seeing the world **through rose-tinted glasses of the past**? Many autobiographies and memoirs tend to suffer from this kind of bias.

4.3 Getting started with research

As we have mentioned above, the research you will do as part of your studies will quite likely boil down to completing coursework assignments, writing essays, and – towards the end of your degree programme – writing your final thesis.

Although some of the assignments may be based on a closed set of topics available for the taking, very often students are provided the opportunity to demonstrate independence and come up with their own ideas and topics. Below you will find a few hints and tips showing how to get started with your research.

4.3.1 The topic

Do not passively rely on your teachers to give you something to think and write about! Remember that what comes in influences what goes out: students showing initiative and interest are likely to get maximum support from their tutor, and consequently, achieve better results.

There is nothing more boring and tiresome than doing research on a topic you are indifferent to. Instead, find a topic based on your interests. Ask yourself the following questions:

- “What do I enjoy reading or talking about?”

- “Does anything I have read present an interesting problem to discuss?”
- “Can I possibly add something to the debate?”

4.3.2 The research questions

Apart from choosing a topic you will also need to formulate a few **research questions** to specify the goals you are going to aim for. What particular problems or areas would you like to explore within the chosen topic?

For an essay, try to think of at least two research questions; you will need more for your thesis. The questions will become your points of departure; your research will provide the answer.

The research questions will also give direction to your reading and gathering of evidence. As you have probably found out while completing the [task](#) in chapter 3.3 above, the number of books and articles written on general topics such as “business English” can be overwhelming. You really need quite specific research questions to narrow down your searches and arrive at a manageable reading list.

An example of a topic and associated research questions:

Topic	Research questions
English as the language of business	1. How can a common language contribute to overcoming language barriers and cultural differences?
	2. To what extent has English been adopted as a common language in today’s international business?
	3. Which particular multi-national companies have benefited from adopting English as their corporate language?

4.3.3 The reading

Begin your research by writing up a tentative list of sources related to your topic and research questions. Focus on sources that may actually be available to you, and discard those that will likely be hard to get. Use the search facilities of the Google Scholar and JSTOR (see chapter 3.3 for links).

You can also use Wikipedia as a starting point. Wikipedia articles tend to have a list of works related to the particular topic; look for the “References” section at the end of the article. However, do not put actual Wikipedia articles on your reading list: in the academic world, Wikipedia is not considered reliable, and most universities do not accept its articles as research material. In short, only use Wikipedia as a way to discover other sources.

Do not read everything you have put on your list, there is no need (or time). Go through each particular source briefly and ask yourself: “Will this book (article, chapter etc.) help me answer my questions?” If it looks like it will, read it; if not, move on to something else.

Always take notes from your reading (refer to chapter 3.2 for useful information and tips). Remember that when you are taking notes, you already *are* writing – even if not everything will necessarily end up in the finished “product.”

Take advantage of your teacher’s office hours to regularly drop in and get feedback on your progress. A meeting in person is much better than an e-mail. Present yourself as a student with attitude and interest.

4.4 Research ethics

One of the assumptions made about research is that it is carried out with integrity, i.e. in line with **ethical standards** the academic environment subscribes to and promotes. Among other things, it is expected that your work demonstrates a clear distinction between the use of existing knowledge (“borrowed” ideas, findings and methods) and your own contribution – regardless of the kind of research you do.

4.4.1 Plagiarism

Unfortunately, the problem of **plagiarism** – “the practice of using or copying someone else’s idea or work and pretending that you thought of it or created it” (definition by the Collins COBUILD dictionary) – has become very serious since the wide adoption of the Internet as a source of information. Numerous acts of plagiarism have been identified in research works done by students as well as by members of academic staff.

There are two general types of plagiarism:

- **Intentional** (deliberate): the person knows very well that he/she is presenting somebody else’s work as their own.
- **Unintentional** (inadvertent): the person is unaware that he/she is doing something wrong; there is no clear intention to deceive.

While the former represents a clear example of dishonest academic practice, unintentional plagiarism is often the result of poor study skills. As such it can relatively easily be prevented. If you look at the following pie chart, you will see that poor study skills constitute 74% of the total, the remaining 26% being attributed to “lack of time” (which is very often the result of poor time management skills):

Fig. 3 – Reasons why students plagiarize.

(Source: <http://hubpages.com/education/The-problem-of-plagiarism-among-students>)

4.4.2 Forms of plagiarism

Plagiarism can take many forms, the most common are the following:

- **Downloading** an essay (or significant amounts of material) from an Internet source, and submitting it as your own.
- **Copying** a significant passage or a key sentence from a source that has not been properly identified or referenced.
- **Using someone else's ideas** or argument, and presenting it as if it were your own.
- **Close paraphrasing:** borrowing heavily from sources, identified or unidentified, and simply changing some of the words or the sentence order.
- **Self-plagiarism:** using a significant part of an older work of yours to create a new work, without acknowledging it.

4.4.3 How to avoid plagiarism

It is actually quite easy to avoid plagiarism if you keep a few important things in mind:

- Remember that university studies are not about achieving results with minimum effort. The fact that people in the Czech Republic are entitled to free education does not mean that they are entitled to free degrees. You need to invest your time and effort.
- Remember that intentional plagiarism is **theft**, and theft is wrong. (Ask your parents.)
- Remember that information on the Internet is not common property, and does not constitute common knowledge. A piece of text on the Internet always has an author.
- Acknowledge your sources properly and fully.

- Learn how to organise your time (refer back to chapter 2.2). Time pressure is one of the most common reasons why students end up copying somebody else's written work.
- Develop and continuously improve your research skills. This [study material](#) is designed to help you with the fundamentals. You will find many other resources if you want to learn more.
- Before you hand in your written coursework, test it using an online plagiarism-checking system such as [odevzdej.cz](#).

Consult your teacher(s) whenever you are in doubt.

Comprehension check

1. In what way is reading important for research in the arts and humanities?
2. Explain the difference between *critical* and *non-critical* reading.
3. Give examples of how *you* typically approach your reading. Have you developed any traits of a critical reader?

Task

Think of your favourite course on the degree programme you study. Now imagine that you have been given an assignment to write an **essay** as part of the course.

Based on your interests or preference, think of a **topic** for your essay, and formulate **three related research questions** to direct your hypothetical research and writing.

Write them all in the table below:

Topic	Research questions	
	1.	
	2.	

	3.	

[Additional material](#)

Recommended reading

COTTRELL, S. *The Study Skills Handbook*. 4th ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

GLENDINNING, E. H., HOLMSTRÖM, B. *Study Reading: A Course in Reading Skills for Academic Purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

GODFREY, J. *Reading and Making Notes*. 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

GRIX, J. *The Foundations of Research*. 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

LEVIN, P. *Skilful Time Management (Student-Friendly Guides)*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007.

WALLACE, M. J. *Study Skills in English*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.