

**PALGRAVE
STUDY SKILLS**

**THE INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT
HANDBOOK**

**HAYO REINDERS, NICK MOORE
AND MARILYN LEWIS**

The International Student Handbook

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The International Student Handbook

HAYO REINDERS, NICK MOORE and
MARILYN LEWIS

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Preface

Dear Reader,

Studying overseas is an exciting experience. For many students their time in another country is one of the most rewarding times of their lives. As a second-language speaker of English it can also be challenging. Understanding a new accent, reading lots of course materials and having group discussions can be both difficult and time-consuming. That's where this book will be of help. The chapters that follow will offer you both advice and a chance to practise the skills you will need to make the most of your studies overseas. The examples will give you an idea of what to expect and the tasks are a fun way to check your understanding.

The authors of this book have first-hand experience in travelling, studying and working in other countries. Your first author, Hayo, writes:

Studying languages has been the most valuable experience of my life. It has allowed me to really get to know the people in the countries I have visited and, eventually, to settle in another country. I wish I had had the advice in this book when I studied overseas, though. It would have certainly made things easier!

Nick writes:

Studying part of my first degree in Italy was a fantastic adventure and one of the things that made me eventually become a language teacher. It was so much fun and such a rich learning experience – everything was different from universities in the UK and the biggest difference, of course, was the language!

Marilyn writes:

I crossed to the other side of the world to study in

a language that was familiar from years of study. Did all that study help? Yes, it meant I understood the written word and could write reasonably well. What was not so familiar was the spoken language. It took a while to become accustomed to the speed of people's speech.

We would have liked to have learned from the experiences of other students. We would also have been interested to hear what our teachers expected from us. That is why we have included our own experiences as students and teachers at universities in different countries. Between us we have studied and taught at universities in twelve different countries. However, we have not limited the examples in this book to our own experiences. You will read advice from many, many other students and teachers.

So where to start? Of course, you can read the book from start to finish. But perhaps there are some topics that are more important to you than others, or more urgent. Use the Contents page to find what you need. There is also a glossary at the end that explains the key terms in this book and which you can use to look up information on specific topics. If you are not sure where to start, read the first chapter of the book. It contains a number of case studies where students from around the world talk about their experiences. We use their stories to identify some common problems and then recommend particular chapters throughout the book. You can also read the introduction to each chapter, where we highlight the main topics that will be covered.

We hope this book will help to make your time overseas more successful and more enjoyable. Read, enjoy your study and be ready to add to a book, one day, with your own experiences.

Hayo Reinders, Nick Moore and Marilyn Lewis

Chapter 1

Case studies: these people need help!

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In this chapter you will meet a number of students we have worked with over the years. Each one speaks English as a second language, and each one is concerned about some aspect of studying at university. At the end of the profile you will read some questions to help you identify the problems they faced.

When you have thought about your own ideas, look at the suggestions at the end of the book (pp. 201–3). If it turns out that you are concerned about the same thing, then follow the directions to the chapter or chapters that will help you.

Case study 1 Chamroeun

Chamroeun is studying for an undergraduate degree. Although most of his lectures are large, and a bit impersonal, he is pleased to be in one class that is small enough for the lecturer to know the students by name. This lecturer encourages everyone to ask questions in class and even to go to her office if they have additional problems with their assignments.

Chamroeun takes up the offer every time and is a constant visitor to the lecturer's office. At first his questions are all about his assignments but gradually, as he realises how kind she is, he starts talking to her about problems with his girlfriend. Lately he senses that she is not so keen to talk about his personal problems, although she continues to be helpful with questions about his assignments. She has even suggested that he might like to see a counsellor.

He is puzzled. In his country staff members are very interested in every aspect of a student's life. Why is this person suggesting he should see a counsellor. 'I'm not going mad,' he says to himself. 'Why on earth would she suggest such a thing?'

QUESTIONS

- 1 How many problems does this student seem to have?
- 2 Can you explain the lecturer's attitude?

Case study 2 Hanna

Hanna is always surprised when her assignments are returned. Sometimes the mark is much higher than she had expected but the reverse also happens. For instance, last week she got back an assignment that she had worked on solidly for a week. Yet, she only got a B. The big surprise, though, was the lecturer's comments. The lecturer praised several aspects of the assignment. How could he possibly praise her for such a low mark? It doesn't make sense.

Hanna doesn't know how to tell her parents about this terrible grade. When she did her first degree in her own country she always had top grades, which is why she was given a scholarship to study overseas. Now, in her postgraduate studies, here comes this disgrace. She feels lonely and ashamed.

QUESTIONS

- 1 How many problems is Hanna facing?
 - 2 Who could help her with them?
-

Case study 3 Tanako

Tanako is a popular student who has had no trouble making friends in her new country. People are always complimenting her on her English and saying things like 'We can understand everything you say.' What's more, she never has to ask people to repeat themselves. She gets their meaning the first time.

When it comes to her assignments, however, the lecturers are often making suggestions about her getting some help with her writing. How can they say this when all her friends understand her so well? It doesn't make sense.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Can you explain why her friends and the markers of her assignments are giving her different messages?
 - 2 What advice would you give to Tanako?
-

Case study 4 Laura

Laura is extremely shy. She was horrified to discover that tutorials meant discussion time. What is worse, the tutor sometimes calls on students to answer by name. She finishes each tutorial feeling embarrassed and stupid. The other students probably think she understands nothing, but that's not true. She understands most of what the other students and the tutor are saying but she is scared to speak.

She is thinking that it might be best to avoid tutorials altogether except when an assignment is being given out. That would save her being constantly embarrassed.

QUESTIONS

- 1 How many reasons can you suggest for Laura's attitude?
 - 2 What advice would you give her?
-

Case study 5 Phond

Phond has come to a Western university for just one year to do a postgraduate diploma. She doesn't really need this for her chosen career but her parents believe having a foreign qualification will help her to find a really good job in her own country.

After the first class test this student is shocked to find that her grade is B-. Immediately she goes to see the lecturer, feeling sure that this kind person will understand. She starts explaining:

'This qualification doesn't mean much to me but it does to my parents and they have spent a huge amount of money sending me here. Would you be able to adjust the mark please?'

To her shock the lecturer looks quite severe and says "No, definitely not." The lecturer also says he considers B- a good mark for the first test in a new country and a new course.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Who is being unreasonable here: the lecturer or the student, and why?
 - 2 What would you suggest the student does next?
-

Case study 6 Ken

Ken is concerned because he cannot take down everything that is said during lectures. However fast he writes he cannot keep up. What is worse, when he goes to read his notes later they don't make sense. He is afraid that without understanding the lectures he will fail the course.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Is Ken right that without lecture notes he will fail the course?
 2. What suggestions would you make for overcoming his problems?
-

Case study 7 Fukang

Fukang is having a hard time getting used to living in the new country. In his home country

he usually studies with others in groups or at least spends time with them after class. Every student joins a club of some sort, either sports or a hobby. Here students immediately rush off after class without paying much attention to each other. Although there are some university clubs, often people seem to arrive together in pairs or small groups and it is difficult to talk to them. Fukang is starting to feel lonely and is also finding it hard to motivate himself to study alone.

QUESTION

- 1 How can Fukang connect with people and avoid becoming isolated?

Case study 8 Tanya

Tanya is enjoying her university studies in her new country except for one thing: oral presentations. Whenever the tutor announces that next week students will start presenting their assignments to the rest of the class, she starts to feel unwell. She gets headaches, her throat goes dry and she feels physically ill. The main reason for this is that her spoken English is not as good as her understanding of other people's speaking. On top of this, even in her own language she never enjoyed public speaking. She thinks it might be a good idea to ask the tutor what she needs to do to be excused from oral presentations.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What do you think of Tanya's solution to the problem?
- 2 If you were her friend, what would you advise her to do?

Case study 9 Marco

Marco's problem is the amount of reading that is expected for the course. He reads English quite well, but not fast. Staying up later and later doesn't seem to be helping. In fact, he is now having trouble waking up early enough to get to his first lecture of the morning.

One day he asks a friend, 'Why can't the lecturers hand out summaries of all our text books? That's what they used to do in my country.'

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why do you think lecturers don't hand out summaries?
- 2 If you were the friend, what would you suggest to this sleepless student?

Case study 10 Umut

Umut found a wonderful article on the very topic of her assignment. She used large pieces of this article in her essay and now has received what looks like a very urgent email from the person marking the assignment. The email is full of words like 'serious', 'plagiarism' and 'explanation'. Even though she doesn't know the meaning of the word 'plagiarism', she can understand that there is a major problem (see Chapter 12 for more on Umut's case).

QUESTIONS

- 1 Do you think this student has been dishonest?
- 2 How would you explain the word 'plagiarism' to her?

Planning your studies

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter will help you to:

- find out where to go and how to choose the right university
- write a good application letter for a scholarship
- choose the right language test
- learn how different language tests (and your scores) compare
- learn what foundation courses are for
- learn from other students' experiences in choosing their studies
- make sure you submit all the necessary information when enrolling

Introduction

You have decided you want to study overseas. Good for you! This will be one of the most exciting and rewarding times of your life. To make the most out of that time it is important that you carefully consider what to study, and where.

Where to go

Here are some common reasons for deciding to study overseas. How important are these reasons for you?

Knowing your reasons for going overseas will help you decide where to go. Look at the most important of the ideas for you from the table on the right, and then ask yourself further questions to narrow down the choices. There are some examples for you in the chart in Figure 1.1.

This chart will help you come up with an ideal list of places to study. But, of course, there are also many practical questions to consider. Let's use the table below to find out how these affect

Reason	How important		
	not at all	a little bit	very
To improve my English			
To study at a famous university			
Because the study I want to do is not available in my country or the quality is not good enough			
To experience another culture			
To take a break and study at the same time			
Because the study I want to do is easier to enter/complete in another country			
Because I will be able to get a better job in my home country if I have studied overseas			

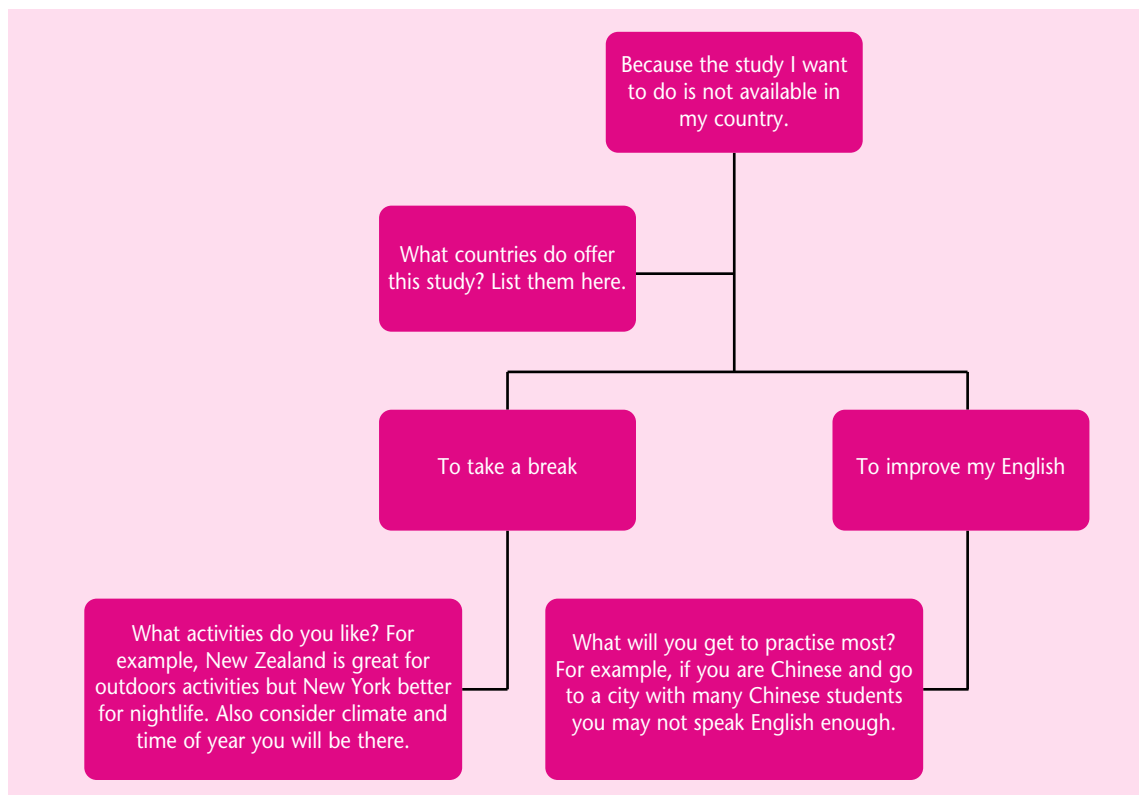


Figure 2.1 Reasons for studying overseas

your choice. First list your top three ideal choices:

University 1 =	
University 2 =	
University 3 =	

Next, consider each of the following practical points. For example, if one of your preferred universities has very high tuition fees and this is a problem for you, that university gets 0 points. If its tuition fees are reasonable, it gets 1 point. If its fees are low, then it gets 2 points. If a question is not important for you (for example, whether you can meet people of your own culture), then simply don't answer that question.

When you are finished, add up the score for each university. Do you have a clear winner? Then you know which option is the best one for you.

	University 1	University 2	University 3
What are the tuition fees like?			
How much does it cost to live in that country?*			
Is it possible to get a scholarship to go there?			
How easy is it to get a visa?			
Are there people who speak your language?			
Do you know anyone there (friends or family) who can support you?			
Is it dangerous to live there?			
Is the climate right for you?			
How difficult is it to be accepted at the university?			
Are the start and finish dates suitable for you – for example, if you want to continue to study in your own country when you finish?			
Total score			

*See the end of this chapter (p. 13) for ways of finding out the cost of living in a country.

Applying for a scholarship

For many students, a scholarship is a necessity if they want to be able to study overseas. Luckily there are many opportunities available to eager students (see below). Your chances of getting a scholarship depend on many things, not the least the quality of the documentation you submit. If the information you prepare is well written, looks as if it has been prepared carefully and gives a good impression of yourself, your chances are that much better. Your cover letter (or 'personal statement') is particularly important to show why you are the right candidate for the scholarship. Have a look at this sample letter from one student. What do you think of it?

What do you feel is missing from this letter?

Hello!

My name is . . . and I am a student at . . . in . . .

I am very interested in the . . . scholarship. I love to study and to travel abroad. My dream is to be a . . . one day.

I have studied . . . for three years and next year I hope to graduate.

The . . . scholarship is right for me as my family is poor and I don't have a chance to study overseas. I hope you will give me the money. I will be a good student and work very hard.

*Thank you very much
Stu Dent*

Here are some key things to include:

- the reason why you want the scholarship (your motivation)
- why you are the best candidate to get it
- why this scholarship is the best one for you (compared with others)
- what you will do after you complete the scholarship
- show that you meet all the requirements

In addition to this, your letter needs to be clear and well written. You want to check very carefully for language mistakes. Always ask someone (preferably a native speaker) to proofread your letter. Also, make sure you include all the relevant documents, such as recommendation letters, copies of your qualifications etc.

A model letter

In the model letter on the right you will find all the elements listed above. But there are some gaps. Fill them in with information about yourself and your studies. Also make any other changes to the text as you find necessary. There is no answer key for this task as your 'answers' will depend on the specific scholarship you are applying for.

What do you think? Is this an improvement over the other example?

Which language test is right for me?

There are many language tests in use around the world. Table 2.1 gives some information about the most common ones that are used internationally.

Dear Madam/Sir

In a recent newsletter from the University of _____ I read about the scholarship. Having nearly completed my undergraduate degree in the area of _____ I am now very keen to get the practical experience the scholarship will give me. It is my goal to one day work as _____ and be really able to make a difference in _____. I think this scholarship will give me a wonderful chance to develop myself further and to learn _____

I am a hard-working student. I have received _____ grades and taken several extra courses, including _____. In addition, I have been class rep three times, been a member of the student board and have assisted with producing our department's magazine. During the last summer I worked as an intern at _____. Although I did not get paid for this job I was eager to learn the practical skills in this field. During my internship I have learned _____ and further developed my _____ skills.

The information about the _____ scholarship says it aims to '_____', and I feel that I fit this description. It also specifically mentions candidates who have experience in _____ and from my attached CV you will see that I have taken courses in all these subjects. I strongly agree with the scholarship's goals to _____ as these are also some of my personal goals.

After I finish the scholarship I plan to _____ and to put into practice the skills I will have learned from this scholarship by _____

Please find attached a copy of all the required documentation. I have checked and am eligible to apply as I am under _____ years of age and have already completed my _____ degree. I hope through this letter I have shown you some of my enthusiasm and motivation for applying for this scholarship.

Yours sincerely

TIP Scholarships

Your own government may sponsor people to study overseas by paying travel expenses as well as tuition fees. A good place to look is at the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Education.

There are also scholarships given by international organisations such as the United Nations. These are usually awarded to students from certain countries or for students who cannot afford the tuition fees. A good place to start looking is one of these sites:

www.iefaf.org

Here, international students can search for scholarships by area of study, by their country of origin, by the region where they want to study, or by the name of the university.

www.globalgrant.com

Although this site charges a fee to help you find a scholarship, this kind of service may be useful when you don't have access to a university or if your university does not have someone to help you with your scholarship.

Table 2.1 Language tests

	Where is it used?	Which version?	Other information
TOEFL	Around the world. Especially in the United States.	There are three versions. More and more testing locations will move to use the internet-based test, while others still use the computer-based or the paper-based test.	It is a test of your global English proficiency. The new internet-based test includes a speaking part for the first time (you talk into a computer) and a compulsory writing section. See toefl.org
TOEIC	Worldwide.	Most countries use only one version of the TOEIC. Japan and Korea are now using an online version which will gradually become available in other countries too.	This is the Test of English for International Communication. It is also a test of your global English proficiency but covers more business, rather than academic, topics. It includes both spoken and written components. See ets.org
IELTS	Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and many other countries that also accept TOEFL.	There are two versions: one general and one academic. You will need the academic one for entry into most universities.	This is the International English Language Testing System. It tests either your general or your academic English proficiency. There are four parts: reading, writing, listening and speaking. See ielts.org
Cambridge	Worldwide and especially in Europe.	KET: elementary level PET: intermediate FCE: upper-intermediate CAE: advanced CPE: very advanced Others include tests for legal or business English.	These are general English (not academic English) exams. There are five parts: reading, writing, listening, speaking and use of English (which includes grammar and vocabulary). See cambridgeesol.org/exams/index.htm

Table 2.2 A comparison of the TOEFL and the IELTS tests

	Possible scores	Common scores required for university entry
TOEFL (paper-based version)	310–677	550
TWE	1–6	4.5
TOEFL (computer-based version)	0–300	215
TOEFL (computer-based version) writing section	1–6	4.0
TOEFL (internet-based version)	0–120	Some require a certain total score (which can vary considerably, from as low as 54 to as high as 90), or a minimum score for each of the four skills, or a combination of the two. Check with your university.
IELTS (no band below 5.5)	1–9	6.0

Which one is right for you depends on what you need to take the test for. To simply get an idea of your level you may just want to borrow a practice book from your school or library to avoid having to pay for an expensive test. If you need a test score for university entrance or for immigration purposes, they will be able to tell you which tests they accept.

How do scores on TOEFL and IELTS compare?

Table 2.2 compares the possible scores for the two most commonly accepted tests by universities, the TOEFL and the IELTS tests. It also shows you common minimum scores for university entry.

Table 2.3 shows you what the various scores mean and how they compare between IELTS and TOEFL.

Table 2.3 How do the tests compare?

Description	IELTS (academic + general)	TOEFL (paper)	TOEFL (computer)	TOEFL (internet)
9.0 expert user Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding	9.0	(700)	300	120
8.0 very good user Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.	8.0	650 647 643 640 637 633 630	280 277 273 270 267	106

Table 2.3 *continued*

Description	IELTS (academic + general)	TOEFL (paper)	TOEFL (computer)	TOEFL (internet)
7.0 good user Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.	7.0	627 623 620 617 613 610 607	263 260 257 253	93
	6.5	603 600 597 593 590 587 583 580 577 573 570 567 563 560 557 553	250 247 243 240 237 233 230 227 223 220 217	87
6.0 competent user Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.	6.0	550 547 543 540 537 533 530 527 523 520 517 513 510 507 503	213 210 206 203 200 197 193 190 187 183 180 177	80
	5.5	500	173	
5.0 modest use Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.	5.0	450	133	66

Source: Adapted from 'What is IELTS' – <http://www.ielts.org/format.htm> and LSE Language)

Foundation courses

When you apply for some university courses you may be told you need to do a foundation course. This section answers some common questions about foundation courses.

What is a foundation course?

It's a course run either by a university or by a college linked to a university that some students need to take before they start at university. Sometimes you can do a foundation course in your own country before going to study in an overseas university.

Why do students have to do foundation courses?

You may need to do one if you haven't got the academic qualifications to do the course you want to study at university, and/or your English is not good enough. For example, you may come from a country where most students study for 12 years at school and you want to study in a country where it is normal to study for 13 years before starting university. You may not have completed high school, or your high school grades may not be good enough for university entry. For international students, you often learn English at the same time.

What do you learn on a foundation course?

Depending on your needs, you can learn a combination of . . .

Course content: relevant to the university course you want to study – e.g. calculus or trigonometry, chemistry, basic statistics. This is usually at the same level as in year 13 at school in the country where you wish to study.

Academic English: how to write an essay, listen to a lecture, participate in tutorials. This part of the course often also helps you prepare for the IELTS or TOEFL exam.

Study skills: e.g. critical thinking, how to use a library, how to manage deadlines.

Information Technology: e.g. using word processing software or spreadsheets.

How long do foundation courses last?

Usually a year, but sometimes longer or shorter. It depends on your academic skills and language skills when you start. Often foundation courses for international students have different start dates, depending on your English language level when you enrol and your academic record. For example, you may need to study for 12 months if your IELTS level is 4.5 but only 6 months if your IELTS score is 5.5.

What happens at the end of the course?

You are assessed on the academic part of the foundation course and sometimes on your English level. Sometimes you may need to take an IELTS or TOEFL test as well. If you are successful you may go directly to university. If you are not successful, you may need to keep studying and retake some units.

How do I find out more?

Make contact with the international student office at the university where you want to study. Tell them about your academic record and your language level. They will tell you if you need to do foundation studies and possibly recommend one or more places.

Case studies

One way of thinking about your university studies is to learn from the experiences of others. Here are some examples of students at different stages of their studies. After each one we have put some questions to help you consider your situation. There is no answer key at the end of the book for this section because choices about study do not have just one right answer.

Before studying

Vijay is at the stage of enrolling for university. His family really wants him to be a doctor but he knows that medicine is not an easy course to be accepted into. Also his uncle is a doctor who works very hard for long hours and he's not sure

if that's the life for him. The university offers a number of other courses, such as a year's study in bio-medical subjects, which could lead to medicine or to other fields of study.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Is there anything about Vijay's story that sounds like your situation?
- 2 How many options does Vijay have?
- 3 If you were Vijay, what option would you take and why?

Malwina has always been good at languages and had imagined she would study them at university but now her friends have raised some doubts. 'What could you do with languages for a job later?' they say.

QUESTIONS

Which of these steps would you recommend for Malwina?

- Go to discuss the future with a careers counsellor.
- Look on the website of languages departments to see what careers they mention.
- Study just one language but choose other subjects that seem to have a more professional focus.
- Talk to someone who has studied languages and ask them about their career.
- Ignore the friends and study the subjects you are good at.

Miyako has already completed her undergraduate degree in Commercial Law. She is now considering doing a Master's but her friends don't agree. They think she should get some work experience first.

QUESTIONS

If you were this student's friend, or if you are in a similar position, here are some questions you could ask her:

- 1 Are you eligible for a Master's programme? Were your grades good enough?
- 2 What do you hope to get out of it? Do you enjoy studying or is your goal to get a higher salary or a better job?

- 3 Have you spoken with someone who works in your field? What do they think doing a Master's will do for your career opportunities?

While studying

Robert has just completed the first year of his degree. He passed in all but one subject. He is being given different advice by different people.

His lecturer says, 'Plenty of people miss one subject in their first year. It doesn't mean anything. Just keep on with your second year subjects and repeat the one you missed.'

His friend says, 'This course obviously doesn't suit you. How about changing to something easier?'

His older sister says, 'You only took that failed subject because someone else thought it would be good for you. Drop that and continue with the others.'

QUESTIONS

Talk about this advice with a friend. What do you think of each comment? If you were Robert, which would you follow? Why?

Ly had planned to major in certain subjects. She had had this idea ever since her schooldays. When her first year results came out the head of department called her in and said that she had done extremely well in one particular subject and that she would be eligible for a scholarship for her fees if she advanced it. Actually this was the subject she had been least interested in all year, mainly because she found the lecturer boring.

QUESTIONS

Which of these options would you recommend? Why?

- 1 Take the scholarship and hope to get a different lecturer.
- 2 Check out who would be teaching the course before agreeing to the scholarship.
- 3 Ignore the offer and drop the subject.

TIP *How to work out your cost of living*

Many universities will tell you on their website how much you can expect to pay for living expenses – rent, transport, food, entertainment etc. as well as student fees.

If you are not sure where you want to study, you can get an idea of typical living expenses by trying some of these websites. Many of them have useful cost-of-living calculators.

University of Adelaide –
www.international.adelaide.edu.au/

Melbourne, Australia –
www.studymelbourne.vic.gov.au/living/calculator/default.aspx

studying in the UK –
UKstudentlife.com/Prepare/Cost.htm

Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand –
www.victoria.ac.nz/international/Tools/costs.aspx

University of Toronto, Canada –
www.isc.utoronto.ca/preparingforuoft/costofliving.htm

Graduate School, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA – web.mit.edu/gsc/www/programs/costofliving/index.shtml

When using these cost of living calculators, check what is included and what is not. Also, remember that while all international students at a university taking one course will pay the same, basic course fees, there may be a big difference between two students' weekly expenses!

Another useful online tool is a currency calculator (such as www.xe.com/ucc/ which can help you work out exchange rates.

Ahmed has started a postgraduate diploma and now has a choice between doing coursework only or doing some coursework and writing a thesis. He is not sure what to do.

QUESTIONS

What would you want to know about this student before recommending either of the options?

- Whether he is disciplined to work on his own.
- Whether he likes doing research.
- What his writing skills are like.
- What he will do after completing his studies.

After studying

Ricardo has completed his degree. Now his parents have said they would like him to continue and do a PhD. In his opinion he is only an average student and anyway he wants to start earning money.

QUESTION

With a friend, work out all the options for Ricardo. If that were you, which would you do?

Enrolling in a university

It is not always easy to enter the university of your choice. There may be only limited places available and you will almost certainly have to meet a large number of requirements. Here is a checklist that will help you to make sure that you include all the relevant information when you submit your application. Check for specific information with the department.

Information to submit	Type of proof/documentation	OK?
English language level	An official copy of your IELTS, TOEFL, or other accepted test result.	
Previous qualifications	Diplomas and certificates. These often need to be (1) translated, and (2) verified (in the case of copies) by a Justice of the Peace or similar.	
Transcripts	In addition to (a copy of) your qualifications you will generally need to provide official transcripts that show the courses you took and your results.	
Previous work experience	Some studies, especially at postgraduate level, require evidence of work experience in a relevant field. You will need to provide some sort of evidence, for example in the form of a statement from the employer.	
References	Some universities require one or more references. These can be academic, personal, or professional. An academic reference gives comments on your abilities as a student, whether you are conscientious, prepare your work on time, work well with other students, etc. A personal reference gives information about you as a person, your social and communication skills, etc. A professional reference gives information about your work experience.	
Personal statement	Many programmes require you to give information about yourself, your reasons for choosing this study and university and your personal and professional goals. You can use the tips earlier in this chapter (p. 7) on how to write an application for a scholarship for this part.	
Copy of passport	Almost always needs to be a verified copy. This means that a Justice of the Peace or a solicitor needs to view the original and the copy and needs to sign it.	
Evidence of your ability to obtain a visa	It often happens that students cannot travel to their chosen country because they cannot get a visa. Some universities require you to show that you are eligible to enter the country.	
Financial situation	You may be asked to give evidence of your ability to support yourself financially during your studies.	

Chapter 3

Improving your English

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter will help you to:

- find out what language skills are the most important ones for you
- find out your current English level
- set your English language learning goals
- find out what kind of learner you are
- find the best language school
- get to know about your university's language support
- build a language portfolio
- keep a language journal
- find excellent ways to learn English . . . while having fun!

Introduction

One of the most important steps in becoming successful in your overseas studies is to make sure your English is good. Research confirms what many students have told us: having a low level of English means getting lower marks and failing courses. So it is a good idea to invest your time before and during your studies to improve your English as much as you can. In this chapter we will look at some ways to do that.

What language skills do you need to improve?

Improving your English starts with knowing what your weak areas are. The better you know what to focus on, the less time you will waste and the better you will know where to look for help.

How will you know what areas to work on first? Here are some ways to find out:

Rate your own English

You can use the self-assessment grid in Table 3.1 to rate yourself in different areas of English. You can then use this to decide what to work on first.