

2025

POSTGRAD

READY IN 12 MONTHS

Metacognition

Think about how you think

*Mindset exercises
to stay accountable*

Practical tips

FAQs

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**THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND**
AUSTRALIA

CREATE CHANGE

12 months to go...

Metacognition: Your key to preparing for postgrad

You've got the potential to make some serious waves. You know it, and we believe it.

But before you can master the unknown, you need to master yourself.

That's where metacognition comes in.

Put simply, metacognition means thinking *about thinking*. It's the ability to step back from your learning process and understand how your mind works while acquiring new knowledge and skills.

As a future postgraduate, metacognition can help you:



recognise your strengths
and weaknesses



identify effective
learning strategies



adjust your approach
based on the demands
of the task at hand.

It's essentially a map that can guide you through the complex terrain of your learning journey.

*Practising metacognition now will prove useful throughout your postgraduate studies.
Here's how:*



Tailor your learning approach. Knowing how you learn best means you can focus on the study methods that work for you, making it easier to pick up and retain all that new info.



Solve problems effectively. Understanding your unique problem-solving process will help you approach assignments and projects in the most effective and efficient way.



Manage your time. Metacognition can help prepare you to juggle competing priorities, break time-wasting habits, and focus your efforts on what matters most.



Reduce stress. Adopting study strategies that align with your learning style means you'll feel more confident. Metacognition can also help you identify the symptoms of stress earlier and equip you with the tactics (and resilience) to get through tough times.

Metacognition exercise:

Assessing your readiness for returning to study

This metacognition business sounds great and all, but what does it actually look like in practice? Let's give it a spin with a self-reflection exercise.

Take some time to write your responses to these questions. Writing these out will help you articulate important insights about yourself, and you'll be able to reference these later.

Self-reflection

What are your strengths as a learner?

What challenges have you faced in previous academic experiences? How did you overcome these?

How do you typically approach complex tasks or assignments?

Do you prefer studying independently or in a group? Why?

Learning styles

Are you a visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learner? How can you adapt your study approach to suit this?

How do you usually organise your notes and study materials? Will this method make it easy to revise?

What learning strategies have been most effective for you in the past?

Setting goals

What are your short-term and long-term goals for your postgrad studies?

Having a clear 'why' will help you stay motivated when your enthusiasm levels drop.

How do you plan to stay motivated and focused throughout your studies?

How will you measure your progress and success during your program?

Time management

How do you currently manage your time? Are there any areas for improvement?

How will you allocate time for studying, research and assignments around your work, family and/or personal commitments?

What strategies could you implement to maintain a healthy work/life/study balance?

Seeking support

Are you comfortable seeking help when you encounter difficulties? How will you reach out for support during your postgraduate studies?

Have you considered forming study groups or seeking a mentor?

Learning from the past

In past study and learning experiences, when did you feel like you were thriving?

What was it about the topic, environment or study method that made you feel engaged?

How can you replicate that experience if you ever feel disengaged during your program?

Returning to uni can feel intimidating, but even just this simple self-reflection can help you transition more smoothly into a healthy study routine.

Metacognition will serve as your compass, guiding you through the challenges and triumphs that await. So, take the time to understand your approach to learning and prepare some effective strategies that suit your study style. Your future postgraduate self will thank you.

“Postgraduate study is one of the best ways to upskill, broaden your opportunities, or even pivot into a completely different career path like I did.

It’s never too late to learn, and the confidence and perspective you gain from backing yourself academically will carry over into every part of your career.

My degree has helped me connect theory with practice, and that deeper understanding has given me more confidence in my role and a clearer sense of where I want to grow in the field.”

Sonika Selvaraj, Graduate Diploma in Resource Development



11 months to go...

It's OK to be mediocre at first

Whether you're upskilling, brushing up, or switching into a new industry entirely, postgraduate study means exposing yourself to new ideas and practices.

And, chances are, you won't immediately be perfect at doing these things.

This can be a little confronting, especially if you're already well-established in the industry you're studying. The experience of suddenly being out of your depth may even lead to the infamous imposter syndrome.

But you've been accepted into the program for a reason. You do belong here, and you are good enough – even if those insecure voices nag at you for the first few weeks of the semester.



So, what's the solution? How do you overcome this block quickly so you can get on with your postgraduate program?

The answer might seem counterintuitive. You need to *get good...* at *being bad*.

The more comfortable you can be with inadequacy, the less likely it is to impact the start of your postgraduate journey. You need to train your brain to accept that you won't pick things up straight away, build the resilience to keep working through ideas that don't make sense at first, and practise forgiving yourself for taking the time you need to absorb new learnings.

So, why not:



Pick up an instrument you've always liked the sound of.



Join a team in a sport you haven't played before.



Enrol in an online short course on a topic that's foreign to you.



Start learning a language you've always wanted to know.



Try a videogame in a genre you're not familiar with.

Worst-case scenario? You fail spectacularly at first, but you gain valuable experience in not excelling at something. You take that lesson and run, or maybe you keep going and eventually get to a level of proficiency you can be proud of.

And, at best, maybe you discover a hidden talent and find immense joy in something you otherwise wouldn't have even tried.

10 months to go...

Practise reading and studying techniques

Returning to university comes with a lot of unknowns, but there's one thing you can know for certain: there will be plenty of reading to do. You'll need to digest and understand ideas and concepts from a wide range of sources.

Whether you devour a novel every weekend or haven't touched a book since high school, adjusting to academic reading may be quite a shock to your system. You can prepare for this by signing up to read journals and publications from scholars, ideally in the field that you'll be studying.



Reading some academic materials ahead of time can help in multiple ways:

- You'll get familiar with the technical language you'll soon be dealing with every day.
- You'll slowly acclimatise to the academic style of writing, rather than diving right into the deep end when the semester starts.
- You'll start your program with some additional context for your area of study.
- You'll have the chance to practise your study techniques with relevant texts.

While you read, make sure you're practising active and academic reading techniques (skimming, scanning, summarising) and approaching the text thoughtfully. You can also try critically analysing the material or taking notes and paraphrasing the concepts into your own words.

To really get into the mindset, you can even try applying these techniques to the everyday things you read – from news articles to social media posts, or even this guide you're reading right now. Just remember: all things in moderation. Your significant other probably won't appreciate a critical analysis of their text messages.



TIP: Practising for study applies to your technology as well. If you'll be using a new laptop or tablet in classes, you don't want to be unwrapping it at your first lecture. Make sure you've downloaded the right apps/programs and know how best to use them.

Exercise:

After you finish reading this guide, try going through it again – but this time skimming the content and highlighting the important parts as you go.

9 months to go...

Check how and when to apply

You can do this online for most UQ postgraduate programs, but some will require you to apply via QTAC, take additional tests (e.g. GAMSAT for the Doctor of Medicine), or meet specific prerequisites. Check the program page on the UQ website to make sure you meet the requirements and don't miss any important dates for your application.



TIP: Note important dates in your work or phone calendar and set reminders to help you stay on track. Consider including relevant events such as UQ Open Day and our Master Your Career Expo.

8 months to go...

Plan your finances

Investigate the scholarships available to you.

Check with Centrelink if you're eligible for Austudy or other forms of assistance. (If you already receive any benefits from Centrelink or other government departments, make sure to get in touch and tell them you're returning to study – this may affect your payments.)

If you're planning on dropping work hours to focus on study, consider adjusting your budget now to ensure you can make it work.

And don't forget to discuss your plans with family, friends and other people who may be impacted by this change.

“Going back to uni was challenging at first, but I handled it by building a little ‘family’ of friends and mentors at UQ; we supported each other through late-night lab experiments and assignment deadlines. Embracing the change taught me resilience and showed me the power of community – I never felt alone on the journey.”

Sky Seth, Master of Biotechnology Research Extensive



*On average, UQ postgraduates experience a 36% salary increase within 3 years of graduating.**

*Graduate Outcomes Survey-Longitudinal: percentage increase in median salaries three years after graduation, for domestic postgraduate coursework graduates employed full time, averaged for 2022-2024 survey years

7 months to go...

Purchase your study gear

Returning to study might mean it's time for a new laptop or tablet, stationery, and home study setup. Buy any new tech well ahead of your first semester so that you have time to practise and get familiar with using it.

Use the empty spaces below to track the specific items you need to purchase.

6 months to go...

Find your motivation – and keep it

Before you even start your postgraduate program, you need to know what your goals are. And you should understand exactly what's going to motivate you to keep pushing through your studies, even during periods of stress.

There's a simple yet effective strategy you can start practising now in your daily life. When you're finishing up your work or tasks for the day, make a note of two things:

Today, I achieved...

Tomorrow, I'll be satisfied if I achieve...

This serves as a daily affirmation that you're making progress, even if only a little, as well as helping you break big assignments and courses into achievable tasks to be tackled one day at a time. This can turn an intimidating big-picture goal – like earning a postgraduate degree! – into a jigsaw puzzle that slowly but surely falls into place.



TIP: Reflecting on these notes weekly and/or monthly can also help you visualise how your ongoing efforts have snowballed into impressive results.

In addition to this, try recording your major goals and motivations in the space below.

What long-term goals will your postgraduate degree help you achieve?

e.g. Higher earning potential, leadership position or promotion; starting your own business; advancing into a PhD.

What short-term goals do you want to achieve during the program?

e.g. Completing a research project or thesis; making connections through an industry placement; acquiring new skills you can apply immediately in your current workplace.

What will I do if I ever feel my motivation fading?

e.g. Turn to my family, friends or university support systems for help; look forward to the holiday I've planned after graduation; take some time outdoors to rejuvenate my energy levels.

“Be prepared to make short-term sacrifices for long-term gain. It may feel like you’re giving up all this time, but really it’s only for 13 weeks at a time! By being prepared and staying on top of the work, it certainly is possible to study and work full time, and UQ is amazingly supportive.”

Brooke Avery-Overduin, Master of Educational Studies

5 months to go...

Update your vaccinations

For some programs, such as those in health care or education, certain vaccinations are mandatory. But even if this doesn't apply to you, being up-to-date on your flu shots can help you stay healthy during your studies.

Modify your routine

Enrolling in a postgraduate program is going to shake up your routine. But making some small changes between now and your first semester can make the transition a lot smoother.

Start by adding one minor thing to your routine. This could be a 1-hour study session on a weekday evening or blocking out Sunday mornings for reading academic journals.

This simple step can help prepare your mind and body for sticking to a strict routine, as well as building your resilience for when you inevitably make even bigger changes to your day-to-day life.

You can use the weekly timetable below to practise fitting new classes and study sessions around your existing work and personal commitments.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
7am							
8am							
9am							
10am							
11am							
12pm							
1pm							
2pm							
3pm							
4pm							
5pm							
6pm							
7pm							
8pm							
9pm							



“To adapt to the new studying routine, I decided to reduce my hours at work. I had never done online studying before, so it was a new experience, but it fitted really well with my lifestyle and I enjoy having the flexibility of doing the modules online at a time that suits me.”

Sandra Micallef, Master of Business Analytics

4 months to go...

Find the right time (and place) to study

You likely already know if you're an early bird or a night owl (or something in between). The times when you feel most energised at work or at home can also provide clues about when you should schedule your future study sessions.

Location can be just as important as time when it comes to effective study. Establishing a dedicated study zone in your home can help you quickly get into the right mindset for revising your notes. An organised and secluded space can also minimise distractions and prevent your family from disturbing your scheduled study times.



Some of the essentials your study space might need include:

- an ergonomic chair
- a speaker for focus music or white noise
- a phone prison* (a desk drawer will do)
- well-organised notebooks
- a neat and tidy desktop
- a nearby window for natural light and fresh air.

*This is optional, but if you can get through the initial discomfort of not having your phone, you'll appreciate the lack of notifications interrupting your study time.

3 months to go...

Plan your content management

You're about to have heaps of notes, books and readings to juggle. Plan how you'll manage all these items, either physically or digitally, and take your approach for a trial run with your work projects or life admin. If you found your items were easy to find and remember, you're on the right track. If not, consider a different strategy.



TIP: At UQ, you'll have free access to Microsoft 365 and the Adobe Suite. Consider using these in the lead-up to your first semester. This way, you'll already be familiar with the programs when your classes start, and you can just focus on learning to be a student again.

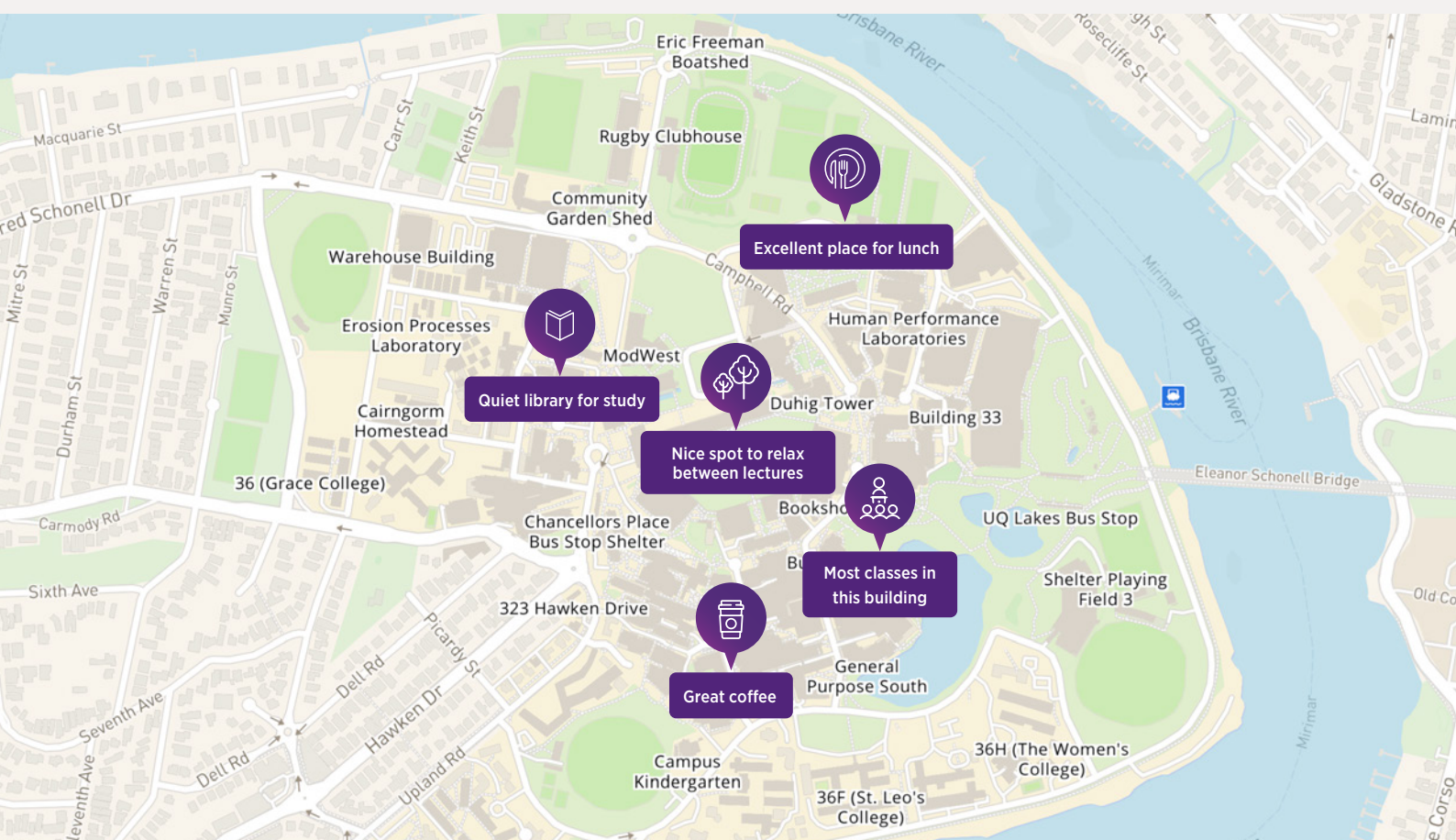
2 months to go...

Get to know your campus

We've all had the nightmare – and sometimes the real-life experience – of getting lost and being late to your first class of the year. Getting familiar with your uni campus can help you avoid this. It also gives you a chance to scout ahead for the best spots to study, relax or catch up with other students (spoiler alert: you're very likely to make new friends during your postgrad program).



TIP: If you'll be studying with us at The University of Queensland, UQ Maps is a vital resource you can start using now to get familiar with the area. If you can get to Open Day, great. If not, try to plan at least one casual visit to campus and practise using the maps app to get around. Our virtual tours are useful if getting here in person isn't possible.



These locations are indicative only. Explore the campus to find your own favourite spots.

1 month to go...

Book a holiday!

When motivations run low, you'll need something positive to look forward to. It doesn't need to be long, expensive or even far from home, but having a little getaway planned for after graduation will give you a tangible reward to pull you through if the studies get tough.

How to apply

- 1 Find your ideal program at study.uq.edu.au/postgraduate
- 2 Check the entry requirements and important dates
- 3 Complete your application online

Postgraduate study FAQs

How can I fund my postgraduate studies?

There are several grants and scholarships you may be able to apply for, and continuing or picking up flexible part-time work during your studies can go a long way too. [Read more.](#)

Can I get a master's degree without a bachelor's degree?

In some cases, yes. You may be eligible to apply for a graduate certificate or graduate diploma program based on your career so far, and you'll typically be able to progress into a full master's program from there. [Read more.](#)

Is now a good time to study a postgraduate program?

We certainly think so. Industries are rapidly evolving, the world is more accessible than ever, and Commonwealth supported places (CSPs) are available for many programs. [Read more.](#)

How hard is postgraduate study compared to undergraduate?

Not as difficult as you might think, because completing a bachelor's degree has already prepared you for what life as a university student is like. Postgraduate study goes into more depth to elevate your learning, so it's naturally more challenging, but keep in mind that you're coming to class with more experience and wisdom than before. [Read more.](#)

When should I apply for postgraduate study?

Once you've decided to pursue a postgraduate degree, it's a good idea to apply as soon as possible to avoid potentially missing deadlines. Plus, procrastination can be detrimental – the longer you put off your application, the scarier it'll get! [Read more.](#)

How can I find time to complete a postgraduate degree?

We know you're already busy as it is, which is why we make studying at UQ as flexible as possible. Depending on your chosen program, this can include online classes, multiple-duration programs (study at your own pace), and the ability to apply prior study to shorten your program. [Read more.](#)

Graduate diploma vs master's degree

How do I choose between a master's degree, graduate diploma and graduate certificate?

Understanding what's offered (and expected) at each study level is the key to finding the right program for you. [Read more.](#)

“I chose UQ for my postgraduate degree because of its prestigious ranking, steadfast dedication to academic excellence, mentorship from esteemed professionals, and the chance to flourish within the dynamic UQ community.”

Ruchita Rajkumar Bhansali,
Master of Public Health



*More questions?
We've got answers.*

Contact our friendly support team
to get advice from a career adviser.