Study guide
FOR STUDENTS AT THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

LINKÖPING UNIVERSITY
Contents

Why a study guide? 4
Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences 5
Planning 6
Getting started 8
Reading course literature 10
Forms of instruction and working 12
Taking notes 14
Memory techniques 15
Motivation 17
Preparing for examinations 19
Academic writing 20
If you need support 21
Suggestions for further reading 22
Why a study guide?

For many people, beginning studies at a university is a big step. The pace is higher than at upper secondary school, the literature is more extensive, and you are responsible for planning your own time.

The purpose of this study guide is to give you information and advice that can help you as you undertake your studies. We hope it will ease the transition between upper secondary and university. Consult it during your studies, if you get stuck or need some help along the way. And you are always welcome to contact your student guidance counsellor if you need to talk to someone about your study situation.

All the best with your studies!
Study Guidance
Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Linköping University
Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences

...involve student-centred learning, which means that you take initiatives, are active, and are responsible for your own learning.

As a student you will encounter different types of instruction and work. These can differ, depending on whether you’re taking a programme or single-subject courses. The instruction is based on student-centred learning, which means that you are active, take initiatives, and are responsible for your own learning.

You are expected to progress your work from start to finish, either on your own or in a group. Lectures alternate with self-study and group work, and seminars are common.

Every course has an examination, either on an ongoing basis or at the end of the course or term. Examination forms differ, and may include exams in exam halls, take-home exams, group presentations and seminars, and they may be oral, written, or use presentation techniques.
Planning

Planning your time is key, because you are responsible for your own studies. In previous years your planning might have consisted of the timetable you were given at term start, and that you would study extra before your exams. Now your planning has to be more advanced than that. A good start is to remember that full-time studies are equivalent to 40 hours a week.

How much time do you devote to various activities? Try to see patterns. What takes up the most time? What time of the day are you most alert? When are you most efficient? Where do you study the best and where do you find peace and quiet?

Because the pace of studies is high at university, you should spread your learning evenly over the term. Having a good plan from the start reduces the risk of procrastination.

To make your first study plan, you need information on timetabling, course layout, dates for handing in assignments, and examinations. Find out what assignments you have to complete during the coming week, which literature you have to read, and how much time you have at your disposal.

When you have an overview of the work you have to do, and how much time you have to do it, enter it into your plan – in sessions of a suitable length. Remember to include breaks. Numerous short breaks are often most effective. Enter your self-study sessions at a time of day when you’re alert and efficient.

You don’t get time, you have to take time. Prioritise. Where will you take the time from? Be realistic when assessing and allocating time. Remember to include time for rest and recovery – you need this, if you are to manage your studies in the long term.

You should also make a plan for a longer period, for instance until the next examination or course component. Post it on your fridge, or save it in your computer or phone – somewhere you can always access it.

See your studies as a job, and make sure you develop good work habits.
When you start your planning, include the following:

- sleep and meals
- necessary activities such as lectures, seminars and group work
- self-study. How much time do you need? (You, not your classmates!)
- exercise, physical activity, recreation, recovery
Getting started

If you have read the previous section, you know a bit about why you should plan your studies. But now you’re sitting there, and you just can’t get going – even though you planned to start.

Decide how and where you are going to study

Think about where and when you get your best studying done, and what it is that characterises that setting. We are all individuals with different needs. So create a study situation that suits you.

Some people prefer to study at home, others have difficulty concentrating when there are lots of distractions.

If you get frequent urges to wash up, clean, water the plants or check the internet, you should probably find another location where it’s easier to focus.

At the university there are lots of places where you can sit and study, either alone or together with others. If you have trouble concentrating, it can be a good idea to sit with someone else.

Studenthuset works well for lots of people. It has quiet study booths and more discussion-friendly study spaces. And if you’re a group, you can take breaks together.
External factors

Make sure you have good lighting, a comfortable chair (but not too comfortable!) and a desk big enough for the books and other materials you need. Try to identify the “dangers”, i.e. the things that make you lose concentration or that stop you from getting started. Remove them.

Turn off your phone. Set notifications and sounds to silent, and put it where you can’t see it. Only take it out when you have a planned break.

Internal factors

To be able to keep up with your studies, you need both recovery and recharging of the right type of energy. Daylight, physical activity, a good diet and sleep are essential.

Take one step at a time. Set goals and intermediate goals for your studies. To get started, it's important to focus on what you plan to study today, not everything you have to do for the entire course. Read more in the section on motivation.

Think positively about your coming studies: “I am going to learn this, it will be easy and it’s interesting.”
Many of the subjects and courses at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences include a large amount of course literature that you are expected to read. Having a conscious study method will help you during your time here. Below we describe one way for you to learn the course literature. The structure can be summarised with the progression “before, during and after”.

**Before reading - get an overview**

The first step when approaching new knowledge is to try to get an overview of the topic before you focus on the details. The same applies when you start reading a new text. Check the book’s title and read the back cover. Skim through the chapter titles and leaf through the contents. Look at images and diagrams. Ask yourself whether you already know anything about the subject matter. The fact that you have already seen certain terms, or that you recall the relationship between unfamiliar materials and things you already know, means that you have passed a major obstacle. Your brain has been prepared for the new material you are going to learn.

You can also take the opportunity to practise sorting through text, which is important for courses with large volumes of reading. Unlike many courses at upper secondary school, the literature can be very extensive, so you have to find a strategy to learn the material in a good way.

**During the actual reading**

When it’s time for the actual read, it’s important that you have first set up the framework of your studies, i.e. what we wrote about study environment and time planning in the Planning section. A good idea is to use a timer or a suitable app to divide your time into sessions of an appropriate length. Structuring your reading into numerous small modules with short breaks will help you retain focus and avoid fatigue.

You can start with short reading sessions of about 15-30 minutes, with 5-minute breaks, and then a short review or summary of what you have just read. Then a new session with the same timing. In the breaks you can give yourself small rewards: time on the phone, a snack or drink, a short walk or something else.
As you read, it’s a good idea to highlight key words, make brief notes or draw images or figures. Try to find the common theme in the text, and keep returning to the central message. Ask questions of the text; and try to summarise it and render it in your own words.

After reading - summarise and review

When you are absorbing a lot of information in a short time, it can feel like your brain is overloaded. Here it's important to review in different ways, so the material you learned yesterday doesn’t disappear when you learn something new today. By reviewing, the knowledge is moved from your working memory to your long-term memory for secure storage.

Review can consist of revisiting your notes or your highlighted content, or sitting down with a few classmates and discussing what you have read. It can also be formulating questions on the text contents, and answering them in your own words. Another method is to draw a mind map of what you have read.

With reviewing, most important is that you do it on several occasions, with time periods in between. Try reviewing once the same day, once after a week and then again a few weeks later. By reviewing over a long time period, you improve your ability to absorb the material.

Reading speed

It’s a good idea to try to improve your reading speed. If your brain is fed with information too slowly, there's a much higher risk that your mind will start to wander. You’ll quickly lose concentration. It’s not the case that you understand more if you read slowly and carefully. Actually, higher reading speed brings better understanding. For suggested readings, see the end of this guide.

Model for reading - a starting point

BEFORE
Skim through the text. Get a sense of the content, and question it. The aim is to get an idea of what it’s all about, without going into too much detail.

DURING
Go through the text more carefully. Highlight key words and the most important sentences. This step is about searching for information and trying to answer the questions from the previous step.

AFTER
Put the text down, and try to summarise what it is all about. Review your notes and key words.
Forms of instruction and working

**Here we present some common forms of instruction and working.** They are here for a reason: to allow you to practise the skills and capabilities you should learn. Give yourself the best possible chance to succeed in your studies. Take part in lectures, seminars and other scheduled events as much as possible.

**By discussing with others, listening to their opinions, and sharing your own thoughts and points of view, you get to practise and participate actively.**

**Lectures**

Lectures can introduce a field or theme, and give you theoretical foundations on which you can subsequently advance your knowledge. The lecturer complements the course literature by giving you new perspectives and presenting current research results. Lectures can also provide the background for future work – individual or in groups.

At times the pace can be fast. You’ll also notice that every lecturer has their own style, which you have to adapt to.

**Before**

Before the lecture, prepare yourself by reading through the literature that will be covered. Think through the questions that arise as you read, and write down important thoughts. The more prepared you are, the more you’ll get out of the lecture. Also, it is easier to understand a lecture if you’re familiar with the concepts that are mentioned, and if you have an overview of the field.

**During**

Choose a seat in the lecture theatre where you can hear and see well. It’s important to be focussed, and to listen actively. Take notes – use key words, images, your own abbreviations or write in point form. If you don’t understand something, ask. There are sure to be more people in the room wondering about the same thing.

**After**

Work through your notes, read the literature that was mentioned and rewrite your notes. Discuss the lecture with your classmates. By talking about it, you get a chance to review it, and to exchange knowledge and perspectives.

**Seminars**

Seminars are a way to process and discuss literature and scientific articles. They can lead you to new approaches by hearing other people’s interpretations; you can get constructive criticism; you can practise formulating your arguments and you can discuss your own and other people’s standpoints.

Arrive well prepared. Read the literature and/or articles that the seminar is to concern. Normally a written document is to be submitted before, after, or in
conjunction with the seminar. Read the study guide – what is expected of you?

**Seminars can involve** group or individual work. For a seminar to be worthwhile, everyone should get a chance to speak – to actively participate and to listen to other students' standpoints. It’s a great opportunity to practise your argumentation skills, and put words to your thoughts.

**Group work**

Group work is common in many programmes. Before you start the work itself, it’s important that the group discusses what you expect from each another as group members. Together, formulate rules for the group. It’s common to write a group contract that can provide guidance.

**Be well prepared!** For the work to proceed efficiently, everyone in the group should be well prepared. Begin to immerse yourself in the assignment. Read through the literature that will be covered, as well as the study guide, so you’re well aware of what is expected of you.

Group work is sometimes presented in an oral presentation, or with a written assignment that you hand in, and sometimes these can be followed up by a seminar.

**Oral presentations**

Most programmes include oral presentation of an assignment, either in groups, pairs or individually.

**When giving an oral presentation, it’s good to start out from the following questions:**

- What is the aim of the presentation (What do you want to achieve)?
- How can you prepare for the presentation?
- How will you structure the presentation? How long will it take?
- Will you use technical aids such as PowerPoint, whiteboard etc?

A good idea is to practise reading your presentation aloud to yourself or to a friend. If you want to learn more about developing oral presentations, there’s a lot of literature to choose from. See the examples in the literature list at the back of this guide.
Taking notes

A good way to absorb knowledge is to take notes. Taking notes makes you more alert and focussed. It supports you in your learning, and gives you good material for review.

Make sure you always have paper, pen, computer or something else to write with, because taking notes is something you’ll have to do in various situations throughout your studies – during lectures, and when you study on your own. And when you prepare hand-in assignments and review for the exam.

The way to take notes so they deliver the most benefit differs from person to person. You’ll have to develop a method that suits your way of working, and that ensures your notes are useful also in the future. Return to your notes very soon, so you make the most of your learning capacity while the material is fresh in your memory.

Methods

Notes/comments. One way to take notes is to write down comments by the text you’re reading. A good idea is to use differently coloured pens to show important points and what you should concentrate on when you return to the text later. In the margin you can write down points that you need to follow up on later, or that help you
understand the context.

**Mind map.** Another way to take notes is to draw a mind map. A mind map can help you clarify structures.

To make a mind map, take a large paper. You always start with a central concept, and then you write down things that relate to that concept by working outwards from it. Use only keywords, and different colours to organise your map. It’s good to start in the middle with an image or a word, and move outwards from there, with thicker branches with sub-headings. You then continue outwards, with thinner and thinner branches. There are also apps you can use to create mind maps.

**Take notes in point form.** Another method is to use bullet lists. With this method it can be helpful to use a numbering system, so you can easily identify the main points. You can also differentiate between the main theme and the sub-topics by indenting text. And you can develop your own system of abbreviations and symbols, so you can work more quickly.

**Post-it notes.** A good idea is to have some post-it notes. They make it easy to mark important sections, or you can write down thoughts that you have, and save them with your other notes.
Memory techniques

There are many different memory techniques; most are based on various types of associations. Using associations, you link new to existing knowledge. This connection makes it easier to remember the new knowledge.

Methods

Repetition is the most important method for memorising. The more repetitions you do, the stronger the mental connections to what you want to and have to remember.

Memory walk
Many people learn better when moving about. Walk around in a room, around the block or along a walking path. While you walk, position words and concepts along the way. By associating them with different objects or places, you facilitate memory. This technique is sometimes called the Loci Method, after the Latin word “loci” which means “places”.

Use your senses
The more senses we use, the better we remember. You can link words or concepts to a colour or an image, and visualise the words or images, to commit them to memory more easily. For instance, to remember the word “monkey” you can imagine a monkey eating a banana, while recalling the taste of a banana. By doing this, you connect a word to an image and a taste. It’s easier to remember things that stand out. When making associations, use exaggerations. There’s nothing unusual about a tree in a forest, but a tree in a shoe is so odd that it is easy to recall. You can also link words to places, clothes, furniture, things you like etc., as a way of connecting the new words to something familiar.

Acronyms
An acronym is a word or sentence formed by the first letters of other words. An acronym can also be used as a “real” word, such as LASER (from Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation). If the acronym is a sentence, the beginning of each word in the sentence is used to form the words that are to be memorised, such as “Laga Ni Äta Vi” (to remember the Swedish rivers of Halland: Lagan, Nissan, Ätran, Viskan).
Motivation

Motivation will be one of the keys to success in your university studies. When you start, it might be easy to stay motivated, but how do you keep your motivation levels high when the going gets tough?

Targets

In order to maintain and boost your motivation, you need targets. Long-term targets can include an examination, more in-depth knowledge of the subject, good future prospects, etc.

To stay motivated in your everyday life, you also need short-term targets. These can include completing short, efficient study sessions. And don’t forget to reward yourself when you meet your targets.

Attitude to self and situation

Your attitude towards yourself and your studies affects your subconscious to a very large degree. If you believe in yourself and in your ability to learn, you’ll greatly increase your chances of success.

Envisage what you want to happen in as much detail as possible; see yourself managing what you have to complete; and try to imagine how good it feels to succeed in this. Use this technique for both your long-term and your short-term targets.

We often repeat thoughts and patterns without being aware of it. Tried to capture your negative thoughts and turn them into something positive.

Negative thought: It will take forever to get through this book.

Positive thought: I will read chapter 1 now. It won’t take long and then I’ll take a break.

Think about yourself: Who am I, why am I studying, what affects my attitude towards my studies, what do I want from my studies, what are my strengths and weaknesses, how do I best learn?

Try to imagine yourself as you want to be in 5 or 10 years. Look at others who are in the position you’re aiming for, and make them your role models.
Make up your mind to succeed with your studies!

THINK ABOUT THE OBJECTIVES
- of the course
- of the entire programme

IMAGINE
the knowledge in a future situation

GET INSPIRATION
from the guest lectures and labour-market days that are held

CREATE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE BY
- choosing supportive co-workers
- choosing a good place to study
- thinking about what you have achieved
- doing something, instead of regretting what you didn’t do

REWARD YOURSELF
for what you have achieved
Preparing for examinations

Every course includes some sort of examination. The most common type is the written exam, which can be done either in an exam venue (lasting from 3 to 6 hours) or at home, where you have a few days to write a longer text that answers a number of questions based on the course literature. Other forms of examination are oral exams, obligatory seminars and group work.

Strategy

It’s easy to get stressed ahead of an exam, and instead of recalling everything you’ve learnt during the course, it feels like you’ve forgotten everything. To avoid stress reactions like these, you can try to develop a well devised strategy for preparing yourself for an exam. A very important factor is when you start your preparations. These should start on the first day of your course. The more you work with the course materials while the course proceeds, the less the risk that you run out of time before the exam. And as the exam approaches, your focus should mainly be on review.

Preparation

Think through how are you going to prepare for the exam, both mentally and physically. As for the physical parts, it’s important to sleep and eat well before the exam. If you get to the exam tired and hungry, you reduce your chances of doing well. Finish your review well in advance on the night before the exam, so both your body and mind have had time to recover.

Exam day

It’s also a good idea to check, in advance, where the exam venue is located, so you don’t have to search for it on the day of exam. Arrive on time. If you’re stressed, don’t talk about the exam with your classmates outside the venue. Rather, focus inward, and try to think positive thoughts. Bring something to drink and eat, so you can maintain an even blood sugar level. While you’re sitting the exam, having a break to eat or drink something can be a good way to calm your nerves. Working calmly and methodically, and not hurrying through the questions, is normally the best strategy in the end.

View the exam as an opportunity to learn, and remember that if you fail, you’ll be able to retake it. Failing is not a disaster, but of course you should do everything you can in terms of preparation and concentration to pass it.
During your studies, you will get to practise academic writing. The focus in academic writing is on being systematic and objective. Further, it is important to provide references in the right way and to be source critical. You have to learn to write in a way that’s easy to understand and to use academic language. You can prepare on your own, and at the back of this guide you will find tips for further reading so you can get started easily.

Academic writing is an important preparation for working life. Most decisions that are made in organisations are based on written reports.

Degree project

All programmes end with some form of independent work. This gives you something concrete to show, something that reflects important parts of what you learned in your programme, and you can show it to a possible employer. All of the written work leading up to the degree project can be seen as important experiences ahead of this more substantial work.

At our Språkverkstaden language workshop, you can get help to improve your oral and written language. Read more on the next page.

Misconduct and plagiarism

By misconduct we mean using prohibited or other methods to attempt to deceive an examiner when one’s study performance is to be assessed. One type of misconduct is plagiarism. Plagiarism is when you use other people’s texts in a prohibited manner. Therefore it is important that students know which rules and norms apply when referring to or quoting someone else’s text. On the university library’s website, under the tab “Guides and support”, you can find more information about managing references.
If you need support

At www.student.liu.se you can find more information about support for students.

Study guidance

Our study guidance counsellors provide advice and support in all aspects relating to your studies.

We support, we coach, we discuss ideas and we guide. You can talk to us if you want to discuss your future, or if you’re hesitant or anxious about your studies. All study guidance counsellors are bound by confidentiality.

Language support

LiU’s Språkverkstaden (Language Workshop) is open to all students who want help with oral or written presentation. You can get help with academic writing. This can include presentations, reports and other similar texts that are common in higher education. You can also get help with oral assignments, planning a presentation, manuscript techniques, preparation, technical aids and more.

Student Health

Well-being is an important part of your studies. If your day-to-day life is affected by mental or physical ill-health, contact Student Health. All staff members at Student Health are bound by confidentiality, and visits are free of charge. The staff includes counsellors, registered nurses and psychotherapists.

Disabilities

If you have a disability and require special assistance during your studies, Student Health has special coordinators for this.

Student union

StuFF is the student union for students at the Faculty of Educational Sciences and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. StuFF’s core operations concern education, working environment, and student support and welfare. If you have questions or require support, you’re welcome to contact the student union. For contact details, see LiU’s student webpages.
Further reading (in Swedish)

**Bergman Marina, Israelsson Britt-Marie**: Att studera på högskolan
Studentlitteratur 2018

**Liljeqvist Björn**: Plugga smart och lär dig mer!
Studentlitteratur 2006

**Axelsson Ulrika**: Talängslan; förstå, utmana och förändra
Studentlitteratur 2011