

## Personal & Professional Development

As we're heading towards the end of our MA course, personal & professional development is an essential element to consider. Personally, I've always kept that into consideration since I graduated from the university. I used to take up a course every year to enhance my artistic skills and expand my knowledge in my specialty area. I went through the UCL guide for PPD, and would like to highlight the important notes:

**Learning is Personal:** Your years at university offer a unique chance to explore and fulfil your interests and developmental aspirations - academically, personally and socially. Your individual learning journey is unique. You are in effect leading your own expedition into unfamiliar territory, with some travelling companions and guides along the way. The experience and outcome of such an exploration will depend very much on **how actively you engage with the opportunities that you encounter along the way**. Every experience, whether formal or informal, academic or social, offers an opportunity to enhance and develop your knowledge, skills and clarity of purpose, as well as the potential for enjoyment. **What you learn and develop will be useful immediately, and in your longer-term personal and professional future.**

PPD for You The opportunities are everywhere, but you must **seize and engage with them pro-actively, attending to the important things as well as reacting to the urgent ones, like impending deadlines for coursework or exams**. And it is what is important to you that matters - **why you are taking this degree, what it offers you now as well as what you hope it will lead to. Think ahead, as well as for now**. It is too tempting to put off engaging with the wider issues in your learning and development until your final year, when the question of **"What next?"** looms large. But development takes time and by then it can be, if not too late, at least severely compromised. That is why the PPD resources have been made available to you [online at www.ucl.ac.uk/ppd](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ppd), along with every encouragement to use them from the outset and make them an integral part of your learning and development throughout your degree.

Your Personal Tutor (more on this later) Although it is your ultimate responsibility to think about your personal and professional development, you are not alone in

this matter. Your Personal Tutor will be able to offer face-to-face guidance and support, especially in the early stages of your learning journey. **Your development plans and progress, submitted via Portico, form a substantive agenda item for your personal tutorials.** You can find out more about what to expect from your Personal tutor on the PPD website (see above).

UCL's commitment to you UCL has long believed in the importance of the personal and professional development of its students. We recognise its relevance to all aspects of the student experience: transition, academic work, extra-curricular activities, as well as to immediate and longer-term career prospects for graduates. Its importance to a UCL education goes beyond this. We believe that a university education should foster not only the acquisition of subject knowledge, but also the advanced skills, attitudes, values and sense of purpose that will enable our graduates to meet the significant challenges facing individuals, communities and mankind on a global scale.

So what do you really want to get out of uni? University is a busy time. Very soon your formal course of study will take up a great deal of your time. Before that happens, it is worthwhile **thinking ahead to what you want to achieve at certain milestones.** Research has shown that **students who are more clearly focused on where they want to end up are more likely to achieve their goals and perform well at university.** **Be realistic and honest** with yourself. Don't set targets you can't achieve but equally, **make sure you challenge yourself.** The goals you set don't have to be anything grand, rather have them act as a focus for your efforts.

TIP: Don't worry if you are not absolutely sure what you want to do, or what you want to be. University is a time of discovery after all. The things you jot down here are tentative and will inevitably change. If you are having trouble, **think about the things you enjoy, the things that interest you or any anxieties that you would like to combat.**

Where am I now? Before you start to think about where you want to end up, it is a good idea to be clear about **where you are now.** This will help you be honest with yourself will help you set **realistic goals.**

Things to think about:

- What are you proud of and why?
- What challenges have you had to overcome to get here?
- What motivates you?
- What are you interested in?
- Is there anything you would like to do better?
- What do you enjoy? What do you not enjoy?

**Where do I want to be...?** When you have some idea of where you are, it should be easier to see not only where you want to end up but also the steps you need to take to get there. It is important when thinking ahead to consider what will help you achieve the goals you set. This could be a series of small goals, or stepping stones, but it could also be the places or people that you need to see to get the information you need to reach your destination.

TIP: Your Personal Tutor should be able to advise you on the opportunities and services available at UCL. See also the resources on the PPD website ([www.ucl.ac.uk/ppd](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ppd)).

by the end of term?	& how can I get there?
by the end of the year?	& how can I get there?
by the end of my time at university?	& how can I get there?



TIP: Take this with you when you go to see your Personal Tutor for the first meeting. It will act as a good basis for discussion.

The Process of Self-Reflection What you have just been doing in the previous section is self-reflection. It is a process that raises awareness of ourselves by

recognising what went right or wrong. But it is also more than that. Being reflective helps you to determine who you can become. It is transformational.

'Reflective practice' is something that you might hear a lot as you advance through university. It is associated with a learning style that moves you towards being a critical thinker and an autonomous learner by relying on your own investigative, or self-questioning, powers.

Self-reflection is also important when thinking about your wider development. It is not just the formal knowledge that you acquire in your academic learning, but the personal and professional skills, attitudes, values and sense of purpose that you develop in the process. Knowledge can arguably be acquired in an 'outside in' process, but skills, attitudes, values and sense of purpose can only be developed from within yourself – an 'inside out' process if you like. That is why a reflective approach is a vital element in advanced learning and development. It can help you pinpoint what you want to achieve in the short and long term. It makes you more self-aware so that you are able to see and present a balanced picture, to yourself and to others. Being aware of your abilities - what you are good at, what interests you, what you find easy, what you need

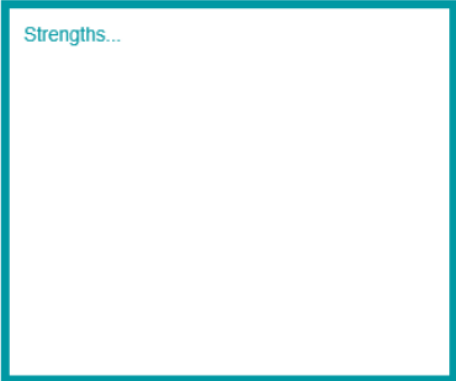
to work hard at – means that you feel more prepared and able to confront and cope with challenges as they arise. It also means you are more likely to see them as just that; challenges and not obstacles or problems. This is because your self-efficacy is heightened, the confidence you have in your ability to succeed at the given task.

Having said that, self-assessment is a subtle art and takes some practice to master, since your view of yourself is anything but objective. We have to see past how we would like to appear to the world, and also past the things that we would prefer the world to not see about us, to present an authentic account of ourselves, our strengths and weaknesses, our aspirations as well as our anxieties. We need to learn to pay attention to the evidence supporting (or not) our claims about ourselves, and plan on that basis. This does not come easily and more than anything else, it is a lifelong journey of discovery.

**Exercise**

Take some time now to think about some of these things

Strengths...



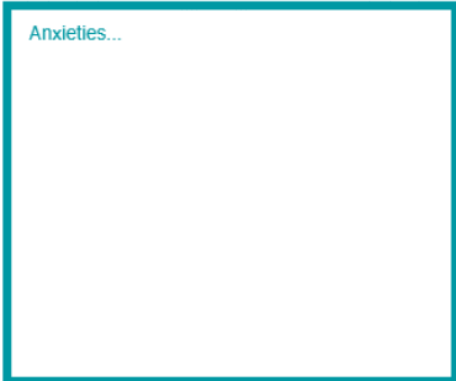
Weaknesses...



Aspirations...



Anxieties...



Now take one of the things you have identified as a strength. Write down how you think that will help you succeed at university. How can you use it to tackle some of the challenges that you might face?



If you have written down any anxieties, think about how you might overcome them. This will help you stay in control and not become overwhelmed. Being aware of what you want to improve will help you seek out the opportunities that will help you develop them rather than avoid them.

### Case Study:

"I have always been nervous about public speaking. So much so that I'd do anything to avoid it. But it was holding me back. I'd avoid taking modules if they involved presentations, or applying for jobs if they had any element of public speaking even if the job was perfect for my career progression. It was crazy. My tactic of avoidance was no longer just about ducking something I didn't like, it was actually holding me back from doing what I wanted to do. Identifying the problem, though, was the first step. Now I knew that I wanted to improve, I actually had to do it. I decided the best way to tackle my phobia was to confront it head on...to do some public speaking, regardless of how nervous or uncomfortable I felt.

Having this goal in mind meant I was vigilant in identifying opportunities that would help me achieve my goal. Initially this was on a smaller, less intimidating stage. In group work, for my MA in Education, I would nominate myself as the spokesperson. This was a role I would happily have let someone else take on previously. It felt good doing it, I have to say. The panic that set in quickly subsided as I began talking and, eventually, it felt like less of a big deal.

This was a good time for me to review what I was learning and how I was developing. It helped me appreciate that I actually was making progress, which motivated me to keep on at it. I realised that I was developing a whole host of skills relating to presenting; summarising the points we made concisely and so that

others understood, representing the views of the group accurately but also then engaging in wider conversations with the whole class. I found I started contributing more to group discussions and letting my opinions be heard. It felt like I was gaining in confidence.

Reviewing my progress has helped me identify where I could and was using some of these skills in other contexts, for example at meetings I felt happier contributing my ideas because I felt I was better able to articulate myself. Being able to succinctly sum up discussions to present to the class could be transferred to the briefing documents that I often get asked to write in order to make them more pithy. I also felt like I was more open and aware of the views of others and sought them out more actively.

Reviewing my progress has also helped me identify the next step that I need to take; speaking to a room full of strangers. I think this will be a bigger step, but I would say I feel more able to take it because I have developed this area in stages. I decided I wanted to talk to someone about what else I could do to better prepare myself for this. They suggested presentation skills training and watching presentations from good speakers to see what I can learn from them. They also gave me advice from their own experience...practical tips and stuff like that which will be really useful."

Taught Masters Student

### **The PPD Framework:**

Personal & Professional Development (PPD) is the system at UCL that has been created as a lens to help you focus on your broader progress at university. It uses a framework to help you explore the skills, knowledge and attributes that you might need or like to develop at university. Frameworks help explain the key factors in a given area and the relationships between them. This framework, then, is a way to orientate yourself in these developmental processes.

The framework can be found online at: [www.ucl.ac.uk/ppd/resources/framework](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ppd/resources/framework)

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<b>Academic</b> Learning Actively Using Sources	Analysing Data Solving Problems	Thinking Critically Managing Projects
<b>Self Management</b> Reflecting on Learning Assessing Oneself	Managing Time Being Independent	Being Creative/Innovative Managing Resources
<b>Communicating</b> Writing Presenting	Listening Communicating Globally	Using Information Technology Planning and Making Decisions
<b>Working with Others</b> Working in Teams Understanding Others	Negotiating Assessing Self and Peers	Leading Managing Change

I will need to go through each key factor in every area and reflect upon it.

The PPD system uses these areas as the headings under which you will be able to record your development, logging evidence as you gain proficiency in these areas. They are intended to represent the areas that you will want to develop during your degree and are aligned with the skills, knowledge and attributes that you should possess as a graduate. When you visit the framework on the PPD website, you will find a comprehensive bank of resources to help you explore and develop the areas you are interested in. How you decide which area to concentrate on will very much depend on your individual needs and on the particular goals you have set for yourself.

Graduate Attributes: Graduate attributes are the transferable skills regarded as being important to employers. Graduates who demonstrate some of the fundamental skills and attributes required by employers are highly desirable and more likely to get the jobs they want when they graduate. The truth is that most graduates do possess these skills, although to varying degrees. The tricky part is being able to demonstrate them. That is where the PPD system comes in as it makes you aware of your capabilities, therefore enabling you to demonstrate how you have used them successfully.

TIP: These development areas are multi-faceted. There are often mechanical and cognitive functions to them. A good example to explain this is 'Using Sources'. The mechanical aspect is the process of referencing within a document. The cognitive function, however, refers to how you use sources to support and develop your arguments. It is the process of using and engaging with knowledge rather than just memorising and regurgitating it.



Exercise:

- Visit job boards and look at the sorts of skills they ask for
- Make a note of any areas you need to work on
- Give the UCL Careers website a visit to see what advice they have to offer [www.ucl.ac.uk/careers](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/careers)

### Reflective Writing:

An essential tool for PPD Writing is a reflective tool, essential for the PPD process. Although we reflect naturally on our own, the **process of writing is more critical and analytical**. It deliberately sets out to promote change. Because **writing is a conscious process** it forces you to take time out of your busy university life, where often your focus is on learning subject-specific content, **to think about how and why you do things the way you do.**

**Learning Spirals:** One thing that reflective writing makes evident is that learning is **not really a cycle, but a spiral**. As you **reach a level of competency in a given area**, and document it through this process of writing evidence, you will also be identifying other **ways that you can continue to grow and develop**. There is never **really an endpoint to your development, rather it is a continual process of growth. In essence, you are a lifelong learner.**

**Getting started:** on reflective writing When critically evaluating your skills, attributes and knowledge, Graham Gibbs, an educational researcher, offers a useful structure for framing your writing.

TIP: We have left space for you to make some notes under the different heading if you would like to get started critically reflecting on your skills.

<b>Description</b>	What are you going to reflect on?	
<b>Feelings</b>	How did you feel about it?	
<b>Evaluation</b>	What was good and bad about the experience?	
<b>Analysis</b>	What was really going on?	
<b>Conclusions (general)</b>	What have you learnt from this?	
<b>Conclusions (specific)</b>	What have you specifically learnt about yourself?	
<b>Personal Action Plans</b>	What are you going to do differently next time?	

## PPD Resources: Tracking Your Development

**Portico:** Portico is the system that is used, amongst other things, to plan and record your development in a systematic way. It is where you make a physical record of your activity that will help you concentrate on how best to develop your skills, attributes and knowledge and how you can best present them to others. This is the basis of the all-round learning conversation that you will have with your Personal Tutor, who can give you guidance if you're stuck and encouragement as you progress. The Portico system makes this planning and guidance process smoother and keeps track of your achievements over time.

Getting started On the PPD website, there is a Student User Guide, to help you get to grips with the PPD system on Portico ([www.ucl.ac.uk/ppd/resources](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ppd/resources)).

Documenting evidence of your abilities: Having concrete evidence of why you consider something to be a personal strength will be invaluable when you are called upon to demonstrate these capabilities. While others are agonising over job applications and post-graduate study submissions, you will have easy access to detailed examples that demonstrate how you exhibit the skills employers are after.

As Dr Anson Mackay, Deputy Head of the Geography Department at UCL, puts it:

“Learning to keep an update of all the skills you are taking on board is beneficial because when you actually start applying for jobs...you can illustrate with actual specifics, with what you’ve done in your university career...Employers will get hundreds of letters with some very bland statements so if you can pepper that with exactly the skills they are looking for then that will make you stand out from the rest.”

Questions to ask yourself Documenting evidence of your various proficiencies, however, is not always an easy task. However, it is one that is worth persevering with.

Sometimes you know you are good at something but are not sure why. **Part of the benefit of writing about these things is to become conscious of what is otherwise automatic and unseen.** Use these questions as a starting point for uncovering why this is a strength:

- **What feedback did you receive?**
- **What approach did you take? Why? What was the result?**
- **Were you happy with it? Why? What do you think you could have done better?**
- **Have you improved on anything since the last time? What effect did this have?**

My Portfolio for Personal and Professional Development By Domi Sinclair, Learning Technologist, E-Learning Environments

**Highlighting and demonstrating your skills and experience to both potential and current employers can be challenging.** **Stating on a piece of paper or in an email that you have a particular talent is one thing; it is quite another to demonstrate your talent.** An e-portfolio allows you to supplement a traditional CV and coverletter with examples of your work and other artefacts so that potential employers can judge for themselves how talented you are. MyPortfolio can help you to do just this. MyPortfolio is UCL’s e-portfolio system and is based on **Mahara software**, which is used in many institutions and organisations around the world. It allows you to **plan, record and reflect on your personal and professional development**, and to **showcase it to different audiences**. You have complete control over your content and pages – anything you put into

MyPortfolio is private to you, until you decide to put it onto a page and share it. You can share that page with a specific person, people, group or make it public. Anything made public will be searchable in Google, increasing your professional online presence.

As with sharing anything online it is always important to be careful. Make sure you have spell-checked everything and that it presents the work and reflects the sort of image you want others to see. For security reasons it is important to make sure you haven't shared any private personal details too widely. You also may want to consider sharing snippets of work rather than full documents; this will reduce the chances of your work being plagiarised by others.

Within MyPortfolio there are many ways to create content, including the CV builder, plans and journal. As well as creating content within MyPortfolio, you can upload files such as documents, spreadsheets, images, video and audio files. The gauge at the side of the files area will let you know when you are approaching the maximum file limit, which is currently 500MB. If you have external content then this can also be added to a page, either as a link or it could be embedded. There is a wide range of embeddable resources, such as YouTube videos, Twitter feeds, SlideShare and Prezi presentations. You can then organise content on to pages, which can each have different layouts and sharing parameters. Once you have created a number of pages you could group them into a 'collection', producing a mini website with either side menu or tab navigation.

Once you finish at UCL, you will lose access to your MyPortfolio account but the good news is you can take the

content with you! You can export a single page, collection or all of your data. There are Mahara hosting sites available some of which are free, where you can upload your exported data and even if you don't want to use one of these you can export your portfolio as a set of web pages. Even if you choose not to share your content with others, MyPortfolio can be a valuable tool for storing examples of work, logging experiences in the journal and reflecting on your development. This can help you more easily recount examples when applying for jobs or during an appraisal.